
Respecting the Patient & Family Cultural Beliefs

Each of us comes from a unique cultural background. Culture includes more than one's race or ethnicity. It includes membership in certain groups or professions that influence our beliefs, values and practices. Examples of these groups or beliefs include age/generational groups, religion, military, sexual orientation and spirituality.

Culture may greatly influence our choices and preferences for everything from what we eat, how we see the world and how we live and die. As caregivers, we need to give respect to the person's choices and preferences to meet their individual needs. The best way to learn about a person is to ask and listen.

A few things to remember:

- When you meet with a new person and/or family ask, "Are there any special customs or beliefs that I should know about when I take care of you?" In some cultures, talking openly about death is not acceptable. Understanding that talking about death may cause the person and/or family distress.
- If the person and/or family members do not speak English, use a medical interpreter. A family member should not serve as the interpreter; it could be embarrassing or upsetting to translate personal information.
- Be careful not to assume a person who belongs to a particular cultural group follows that culture's usual practices and beliefs. Always ask about the individual's beliefs, practices, and preferences.
- Communication styles and preferences for medical decision making in the family may vary among cultural groups. Respect the person's and/or family's decision-making even if it is different from yours.
- The use of touch may be uncomfortable for some individuals. Always ask before touching as touch may not be appropriate in some cultures. Ask before holding a hand or giving a hug.
- Some cultures have specific practices and rituals for end-of-life care and for expressing grief. It is important to respect and honor those practices.

Other HPNA Teaching Sheets on are available at www.HPNA.org

Reference

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