



## Cultural Insights

*A bi-yearly publication of RMHP designed to increase understanding of cultural differences and improve patient outcomes.*

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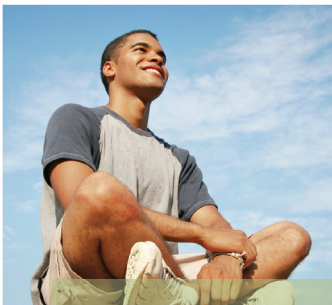
## Multi-Cultural Health Care Communication

### Communication Barriers

There can potentially be significant consequences that occur when language barriers exist between a health care provider and a patient. A simple misinterpretation of a certain word(s) can even lead to negative outcomes. For instance, according to “Caring For Patients from Different Cultures” the word “horita” in Mexico means *right now* but in Puerto Rico it means *in an hour or so*. This could obviously cause challenges even between two Spanish speaking individuals in a health care setting.

Communication is a broad concept that encompasses the entire scope of human interaction both verbal and nonverbal. It provides the means necessary for us to relate and convey thoughts and feelings to one another.

In a general overview, patients from different cultures bring with them unique communication patterns that are frequently found in the ethnic backgrounds and culture from which they originate.



There are over 46 million people in the United States of America that do not speak English as their primary language (U.S. Census Bureau 2000) and they constitute a diverse range of cultural backgrounds from many different regions in the world.

Even patients who understand English can sometimes encounter major confusion. “Caring for Patients from Different Cultures” gives the example of a young deaf man who was told he was HIV positive. There was no one available at the medical practice to interpret through sign language. Since the young man could read lips he was told directly. In deaf culture, “positive” means good and “negative” means bad. He initially took the diagnosis to mean he did not have the HIV virus!

### Awareness of Interpretation

As a health care provider there are opportunities to relieve these miscommunications. One proactive step is a careful interpretation of nonverbal communication from the patient. Obviously the young deaf man would convey that he is happy and relieved immediately after the HIV diagnosis. An awareness of his reaction would immediately give away that the diagnosis was misinterpreted.

(continued...)

## Language Access Services

The Office of Minority Health provides a guide to implementing Language Access Services in health care organizations. The guide is available on the web at <https://hclsig.thinkculturalhealth.org/user/home>. rails. The Office of Minority Health has sponsored the creation of the guide to assist health care organizations with meeting the needs of patients with limited English proficiency. With the ever-growing diversity of Colorado's patient population, the Language Access Services (LAS) guide can be an important tool in helping improve the quality of health care for patients who may not speak English.

The LAS guide provides you with the steps necessary for implementation and continuous improvement of such services. It may be most valuable to smaller

health care organizations as most information provided is from fellow health care professionals working in smaller organizations from across the U.S.

## Interpretive Services

As an RMHP participating physician or provider, it is your responsibility to provide interpretive services for RMHP Members enrolled in federally funded programs, at no cost to the Member. Additionally, the interpretive services are not billable to RMHP. If your office is unable to accommodate interpretive requests, RMHP provides access to a language line for providers seeing RMHP Members. Translators representing multiple languages are available and can be arranged by calling RMHP Customer Service at 970-243-7050 or 800-346-4643.

**Please note: Information given about a particular culture is intended to provide only a general idea of belief systems. It is important not to stereotype or categorize a patient based on his or her culture or country of origin. Beliefs depend upon many factors, including the degree of acculturation and assimilation. Use the information as a guide, but individualize for each patient.**

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