



## Cultural Insights

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

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### What you are communicating without speaking...?

**Sometimes our nonverbal communication cues can send unintentional messages.**

Nonverbal communication can take many different forms including direct eye contact, physical touch, and gesturing. Each of these nonverbal forms of communication can have different meanings depending on a patient’s cultural background.

According to *Culture and Nursing Care*, direct eye contact in many cultures is considered rude or disrespectful. In some cultures, direct eye contact is avoided with authority figures or people who are perceived to be from a higher socio-economic class. A provider may experience frustration or confusion if the patient will not make eye contact while treatment is being explained. However, having knowledge about the patient’s cultural background may explain why the patient is not addressing the provider directly. This can potentially alleviate uncomfortable or frustrating situations.

Physical touch is another form of nonverbal communication which can vary from culture to culture. Being cognizant of a patient’s personal space as well as boundaries for physical touch can make office visits more comfortable for the patient and provider. This may also open the lines of communication and strengthen the patient/provider relationship. For example, because physical examination is needed during most provider/patient appointments, understanding the patient’s cultural background and comfort with personal contact can assist the provider in creating an environment that is comfortable



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for the patient either by explaining what is about to occur or having a nurse in the room to assist.

Lastly, gesturing is a commonly used form of nonverbal communication. Some people are more animated in conversation and use hand gestures to emphasize a point or stress excitement. Depending on cultural background and upbringing, individuals will interpret hand gestures differently. The simple motion of pointing or calling someone by using a finger can be perceived as insulting. As a provider in the health care industry, it is critical to be cognizant of all forms of communication as it relates to cultural competency.

Nonverbal communication can play a large role in building a strong patient/provider relationship. A person’s culture can define how they interpret and react to a situation. Often people are not aware of how others perceive their nonverbal communication. With a population as culturally diverse as the one we live in today, honing nonverbal communication skills can be the door to a successful patient/provider relationship which can lead to better clinical outcomes.

Additional training on the importance of Cultural Competency is offered through the Office of Minority Health by going to the following website: <https://cccm.thinkculturalhealth.org>.

## Did you know?

- Although African American children aged 19 to 35 months had comparable rates of immunization for Hepatitis, influenza, Measles, Mumps, Rubella, and Polio, they were slightly less likely to be fully immunized, when compared to non-Hispanic white children.
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders are 3.7 times more likely to be obese than the overall Asian American population.
- In general, American Indian/Alaska Native adults are 60 percent more likely to have a stroke than their white adult counterparts.
- Hispanic women are twice as likely as non-Hispanic white women to be diagnosed with cervical cancer.

*Office of Minority Health website retrieved December 11, 2009*

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. 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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