



PARTNERING WITH DIVERSE PATIENTS: TIPS FOR OFFICE STAFF TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATION

1. Build rapport with the patient.

- Address patients by their last name. If the patient's preference is not clear, ask, "How would you like to be addressed?"
- Focus your attention on patients when addressing them.
- Learn basic words in your patient's primary language, like "hello" or "thank you".
- Recognize that patients from diverse backgrounds may have different communication needs.
- Explain the different roles of people who work in the office.

2. Make sure patients know what you do.

- Take a few moments to prepare a handout that explains office hours, how to contact the office when it is closed, and how the PCP arranges for care (i.e. PCP is the first point of contact and refers to specialists).
- Have instructions available in the common language(s) spoken by your patient base.

3. Keep patients' expectations realistic.

- Inform patients of delays or extended waiting times. If the wait is longer than 15 minutes, encourage the patient to make a list of questions for the doctor, review health materials or view waiting room videos.

4. Work to build patients' trust in you.

- Inform patients of office procedures such as when they can expect a call with lab results, how follow-up appointments are scheduled, and routine wait times.

5. Determine if the patient needs an interpreter for the visit.

- Document the patient's preferred language in the patient chart.
- Have an interpreter access plan. An interpreter with a medical background is preferred to family or friends of the patient.
- Assess your bilingual staff for interpreter abilities. (see Employee Language Skills Self-Assessment Tool).
- Possible resources for interpreter services are available from health plans, the state health department, and the Internet. See contracted health plans for applicable payment processes.

6. Give patients the information they need.

- Have topic-specific health education materials in languages that reflect your patient base. (Contact your contracting health plans/contracted medical groups for resources.)
- Offer handouts such as immunization guidelines for adults and children, screening guidelines, and culturally relevant dietary guidelines for diabetes or weight loss.

7. Make sure patients know what to do.

- Review any follow-up procedures with the patient before he or she leaves your office.
- Verify call back numbers, the locations for follow-up services such as labs, X-ray or screening tests, and whether or not a follow-up appointment is necessary.
- Develop pre-printed simple handouts of frequently used instructions, and translate the handouts into the common language(s) spoken by your patient base. (Contact your contracting health plans/contracted medical groups for resources.)