

# Twelve Tips to Have Culturally Sensitive Patient-Provider Discussions

“Every patient is a teacher, and we as health care professionals must be students of each patient.”

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## Build rapport.

Getting to know a new provider isn't easy. Try to connect authentically with your patient. Ask about their life, work, and loved ones. Building on this connection could elicit more honesty and trust.

## Provide safety.

Safety goes beyond physical safety, it could also include feelings, anxiety or unrest in unfamiliar or historically unfair environments. Cultivate a safe environment. Be mindful of how others may perceive your demeanor, tone, body language and comments.

## Create realistic plans.

Chronic diseases such as chronic kidney disease, hypertension, and diabetes need daily management. Work with patients to create care plans that fit into their life at home, at work, with family and friends and within their resources.

## Find gaps.

Gather information about your patient's medical management and issues with consistency. Dig in! Understand the challenges they have with maintaining their health plan. What social supports or resources do they need?

## Affirm all identities.

Create a personalized approach to identifying yourself to patients and inviting them to do the same with you. Asking a patient their preferred name and/or wearing pronoun pins can establish a norm that values and respects identity.

## Validate experiences.

Healthcare interactions can be anxiety provoking. Ask how they feel. Ask about their experience with their care. Empathize and remember they may be navigating emotional strife. Your words and actions can invalidate their experience if you are not intentional.

## Use "Tell me".

Don't ask yes/no questions. Ask patients to tell you about their day to learn more about the foods they are consuming, work schedule, financial constraints, and the health conscious activities they are engaging in. For example, consider cultural foods and ways to adjust consumption without advising absolute restriction.

## Reinforce safety.

Historical exclusion, experimentation, and/or fear of privacy breach are a few reasons patients may not feel safe. Refrain from using judgmental language such as "non compliant" and "frequent flyer". Don't shame patients or make assumptions about their health behaviors. Provide an opportunity for patients to open up naturally by being empathetic.

## What's missing?

Ask patients about therapies that worked for them, that didn't work for them. Leverage teach back and other evaluative methods to determine understanding. Remember to use plain language to prevent exacerbating gaps in knowledge. Always include the patient in the discussion to choose a treatment plan.

## Treat people.

Getting to know your patients as people includes viewing them holistically. Explore the health beliefs and routines that your patients participate in, before you adapt new or modified interventions.

## Establish trust.

Healthcare is a continuum. So is trust. Show patients that they can trust you to care for them, prioritize and consider the wellbeing of everyone. Attempt to understand the concerns of patients and provide a grounding environment for resolution during times of conflict.

## Recruit family.

As they say, "it takes a village". Value input from individuals and their families (this includes chosen family as well). This can assist you in better understanding the patient's needs, abilities, and resources.



Healthcare is only as great as the systems in place and leadership commitment to ensuring valuable patient-provider interactions. This leads to efficient, safe, and compassionate care. Without understanding the patient, we miss an important component to treatment. Considering the patient should be a wholistic approach that includes prioritizing their beliefs and needs, instead of prescribing what we think they need. We encourage you to bring with you your medical expertise while simultaneously inviting the patient and their expertise to work together to make a life plan. Remember that the patient is the expert of their experience.