



# PROVIDER & PATIENT

*Communication Guide*



**CULTURAL  
COMPETENCY  
COALITION**



All health care organizations that receive federal funds are required to demonstrate their ability to provide both culturally and linguistically appropriate care and services. The National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Health Care (*the National CLAS Standards*) are intended to advance health equity, improve quality, and help eliminate health care disparities by providing a blueprint for individuals and health care organizations to implement culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Adoption of these Standards will not only provide best practices in health care settings but will help advance better health and health care in the United States.

## DEFINITION OF CULTURE

When providing care, it is important to have shared meanings of terminology with office staff and with your patients. This includes the definition of culture. Utilizing a consistent and expansive definition of culture will contribute to providing culturally competent care. By sharing the definition of culture with your patients, you allow for rich discussions about culture that may be incorporated in a patient's care.

Culture is an integrated pattern of human behavior which includes but is not limited to: Ethnicity, Race, Sex, Gender Identity, Socioeconomic Status (SES), Religion, Sexual Orientation, Manners of Interacting, Rituals, Courtesies, Thoughts, Beliefs, Roles, Customs, Expected Behavior, Languages, Relationships, Practices, and Traditions.



## **PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE**

It is the hope that you and your office staff will find this guide an informative tool in helping your patients:

- Understand their care.
- Follow directions for their care.
- Feel comfortable with bringing concerns to your attention.
- The guide also provides information that can improve patient outcomes, including:
  - » The role culture plays in patient care.
  - » Tips and Techniques to improve patient health care and safety knowledge.
  - » Health literacy warning signs and ways to address the issue.

## **PROVIDER RESPONSIBILITY**

It is your responsibility to:

1. Respect and support the patient's right to receive information.
2. Create an office where your patients feel comfortable asking questions.

Your office staff can help! They are the first and last to see the patient. It is crucial that your staff recognize how culture, health literacy and an open environment can improve your patient's health and well-being.

## **DEVELOPED BY**

This guide was created by several AHCCCS contractors called the ***Cultural Competency Coalition, known as the C3 group.***

The C3 team creates patient education tools and resources for providers. These tools assist providers with patient education topics, such as, how to:

- Follow their medical and pharmaceutical treatments
- Follow self-care practices and
- Decrease unsafe risks.

## **GETTING STARTED WITH THIS GUIDE**

1. Review this guide in detail with your staff.
2. Practice and reinforce the concepts in this guide with your office staff. Encourage team accountability.
3. Make copies of the checklist found at the end of this guide and give it to your patients before you meet with them to complete while they are waiting to be seen.
4. Ask the patient if they would like you to help them complete the checklist for them.

***Thank you for being our partner as we strive  
for continued positive outcomes!***

## **WHAT IS HEALTH LITERACY?**

Health Literacy is defined by the National Health Education Standards as *“the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways which are health-enhancing.”*

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

Health illiteracy affects nearly 1 in 2 American adults (approximately 90 million people).

Adults with low literacy:

- May have challenges understanding written instructions on prescription drug bottles, appointment slips, referrals, medical education brochures, doctor’s directions and consent forms.
- Are likely to have more hospital visits, ER visits and remain in the hospital nearly 2 days longer than adults with high health literacy.
- May experience difficulty navigating the health care system.

## **EVERYONE BENEFITS**

Everyone benefits from clear communication. Don't assume anything about your patient's ability to understand medical information or navigate the health care system. We all could use help. Patients have the right to get complete and current information about their health care condition so that they can make informed decisions about their health care. Patients with limited English proficiency and/or other communication needs have a right to language assistance, at no cost to them, to facilitate timely access to all health care and services. This may include oral interpretation, American Sign Language interpretation, and/or written translation of documents vital to treatment.

## **PROVIDER TIPS:**

### **COMMUNICATION IS A 2 WAY STREET**

You can lead a respectful and effective 2-way conversation with your patients to ensure they understand their health situation and how to care for their health. Here are 2 simple actions you can take:

1. Provide information in a plain, simple and clear language.
2. Check for understanding before ending the conversation.

Providers show respect and support for the patient's right to get information by creating an open, comfortable environment. Office staff can help! They are the first and last to see the patient. Share everything you know about cultures, health literacy, and creating an open environment with your staff.

## **FACTS ABOUT YOUR PATIENTS!**

It is important that your patients understand the information you give them. Providers, who are sensitive to the fact that their patients may not have good feelings about their ability to understand

or read information, will have better outcomes than those who disregard this aspect of patient care and safety.

- Up to 90% of patients forget what their doctor tells them as soon as they leave the doctor's office.
- Nearly 50% of what patients DO remember is recalled incorrectly.
- Patients don't ask questions because they are ashamed to admit they don't understand instructions.

### **PRACTICING GOOD HEALTH LITERACY WILL HELP YOUR STAFF WITH:**

- Treating your patients with respect and dignity.
- Improving health care delivery and outcomes.
- Decreasing repeat office, ER and hospital visits.
- Decreasing unnecessary lab tests.
- Increasing adherence to medical regimen.
- Improving office staff cultural and linguistic competency.
- Increase patient participation in treatment plans and appointment schedules.
- Listening to what the patient says.

### **WATCH HOW PATIENTS ACT**

- Not getting their prescriptions filled, or not taking their medications as prescribed.
- Consistently arriving late to appointments.
- Returning forms without completing them.
- Requiring several calls between appointments.

### **Look for clues that a patient may have low health literacy**

*"I forgot my glasses."*

*"My eyes are tired."*

*"I'll take this home for my family to read."*

*"What does this say? I don't understand this".*

## PROVIDER TIPS:

### PREPARE, PRACTICE AND REVIEW

#### 1 PREPARE

**Get to know your patients = create a safe environment. Talk to them about their beliefs or find out how they understand their health problem.**

**Use a variety of ways to meet the needs of different types of learners and cultures. You may need to utilize certified bilingual staff or language service vendors for face-to face interpretation, video remote interpretation, or written translation services.**

Understand how culture plays a role in adhering to and understanding health management:

- a. **Provider preference.** Some cultures prefer to utilize holistic treatment, or traditional healing practices. Help your patient become aware of providers they may connect with to meet their needs.
- b. **Communicating symptoms.** Some cultures may communicate symptoms differently, some languages do not have words for depression or other symptoms, some cultures don't use the word depression but will say they are "blue". Be aware that there will be a variety of ways that culture shapes the communication of symptoms.
- c. **Family involvement.** Family plays a role in managing the health care of the patient and/or making decisions.
- d. **Diet restrictions.** Foods that are commonly eaten by certain cultures are sometimes restricted. Help your patient understand how to modify their intake of these foods.
- e. **Medication.** Taking or not taking medicines are driven by culture. Some cultures believe in a natural remedy. If there are more natural supplements, talk to your patient about how to or not to use these. Make sure the individual understands how to take the medication. Miscommunication over a dose of medication can be fatal.

- f. **Speak up.** Some cultures feel that speaking up is challenging the doctor and that it is disrespectful. Let your patient know that you would like them to speak up.

**Patients should be encouraged to ask questions of their health care providers. To help improve patient communication and to ensure patients have a better understanding of their health, providers can:**

1. Share with the patient what the key health concern is.
2. Convey to the patient what he or she needs to do about this health concern.
3. Communicate to the patient why it is very important to do this.
4. Ask the patient to repeat the information back to you.
5. Ask the patient *“What questions do you have?”*

## 2 PRACTICE

---

### USE SIMPLE WORDS.

- a. Avoid jargon.
- b. Do not use acronyms.
- c. Avoid technical language *(if possible)*.
- d. Define medical terms if you must use them.

### GIVE INFORMATION IN SMALL CHUNKS.

Focus on key behaviors or actions that the patient must take.  
*“Read”* written instructions out loud.

### REINFORCE.

- a. Speak slowly *(don’t shout)*.
- b. Use body language to support what you are saying.
- c. Draw pictures, use posters, models or physical demonstrations.
- d. When using written materials, circle or highlight key information.

## **GET HELP.**

- a. Use video and audio media as an alternative to written information.
- b. Use medically trained interpreters.

## **3 REVIEW**

---

### **ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS.**

Some people may not know how to write, so asking them to write would not be appropriate. Instead ask them open ended questions.

### **ASK THE PATIENT IF THEY WOULD LIKE YOU TO WRITE DOWN THE INFORMATION FOR THEM.**

### **ASK PATIENTS TO REPEAT BACK TO YOU.**

Then you affirm by repeating back! Use affirmation “Yes, that’s right...” or “Let me see if I can say it another way...”

### **TEACH BACK/SHOW ME METHOD**

The “teach back method” is the easy way for you to:

- Effectively communicate with your patient.
- Be respectful without making your patient feel shame.
- Test how well you explained things, not how well your patient understood!
- Teach over or re-explain something before your patient leaves the office.
- Teach back results in better health outcomes for your patient. At the heart of this is the patient’s safety and understanding.

Check for understanding before ending a conversation. Examples:

*I want to make sure that I explained everything to you; could you tell me how you would describe your medical condition?*

*I want to make sure that I have answered all of your questions, what questions do you think that your family members may ask of you about your doctor’s visit?*

*Can you show me how you will check your blood sugar levels?*

*We've gone over a lot of information today, what are the 2 or 3 things that you are going to do?*

*Repeat it back = once the patient has explained everything to you, you affirm by repeating back! "Yes, that's right..." or "Let me see if I can say it another way..."*

## **PROVIDER**

### **START, STOP AND CONTINUE METHOD OF REINFORCEMENT**

Your patients not only need to know what they have to do differently, but they also need to know what they are currently doing well. Here are 3 simple steps that will help you summarize your patient's actions.

1. **Stop:** What behaviors does your patient need to stop doing that is getting in the way of their care?
2. **Start:** What things does your patient need to start doing to take better care of their condition?
3. **Continue:** What are the things that your patient currently is doing that they need to continue to do? These are positive things that are working well given their health condition.

## **PATIENT**

### **PATIENT CHECKLIST**

Medicines to take *(and/or stop taking)*

Next Appointment

### **STOP, START AND CONTINUE**

1. **Stop** *(What behaviors do I need to stop doing? Things that get in the way of my care)*
2. **Start** *(What things do I need to start doing to take better care of my health?)*
3. **Continue** *(What things do I need to continue to do?)*

## **ASK YOUR DOCTOR THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE OFFICE**

1. What else do I need to know about my health problem?
2. What do I need to do to get better?
3. What medicines do I need to take?
4. What foods should I eat/not eat?
5. What other places can I go for help?
6. Why is it important for me to follow these directions?
7. What's next? Prepare for next appointment.

