



Bringing Your Indigenous Culture To Your Medical Visits

For many American Indian/Alaska Native patients and families, Indigenous culture is a central aspect to their life. The values and practices of a person's indigenous culture influences the mental, physical, spiritual, and social aspects of health and wellbeing.

However, when a patient has a medical visit, they can have a hard time communicating the cultural aspects of their life with providers, even when it is relevant to the health issue being covered during the visit.

Why is it difficult to share cultural aspects?

The answer can include one or all of the three possible answers.

- Lack of trust in provider.
- Concern that the provider will not understand/respect what is shared.
- Adherence to cultural norms that prevent one from sharing cultural knowledge in a public way and particularly with those who are not indigenous.

Tips for sharing – 3 Questions to Ask Yourself?

What do I need to share from my indigenous culture that will improve the care I receive?

For example, you are interested in getting help with headaches you are having. You decide to share with the provider that you are fasting for cultural reasons, feeling that this may help your provider in treating your headaches.

What do I want to share and how will I describe it to my provider?

In the same way that medical providers translate medically complex items into common words for patients, you may need to translate culturally complex items into terms that your provider will understand. Using the example above, you might decide what you feel comfortable sharing about your fasting, translating it into terms that your provider can understand.

Was sharing of my Indigenous culture understood and received with respect?

If you answer "no" to either question, think about how you can address this with your provider before the visit ends. Medical providers often ask patients, "Tell me what you heard?" and you could use that same approach to see what the provider heard about what you shared.