

Quick Tips for Providers Serving Marshallese Patients & Clients

What should healthcare providers do or understand?	Why is this helpful or important?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Say “<i>iakwe</i>” [pronounced YOK-way] at the start of the appointment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This shows that the provider cares enough to learn something about the patient’s language and culture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce yourself, “<i>lakwe, eta in</i> (pronounced een) (insert your name).” <i>Etam?</i> (this means, “What is your name?”) Then, thank the patient for coming to the appointment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This helps build the patient-provider relationship.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marshallese families are very large and include extended family as well as non-biological family members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers should be aware for this in order to ask the appropriate questions when taking a family health history.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain why each family and personal health history question is being asked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patients will be more willing to give accurate information if they understand how it affects their health.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a community health worker (CHW) or trained interpreter present at the clinic, and ensure they are accessible to the patient from the start to the end of the appointment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not only may there be a language barrier, but Marshallese and U.S. healthcare systems are different. Therefore, common practices in U.S. facilities may be unfamiliar to Marshallese patients.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marshallese customs and beliefs may lead some patients to treat themselves at home before visiting a healthcare provider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers should respect a patient’s beliefs and recognize that the patient may not be familiar with how Western medicine works. It could be beneficial for the provider to ask what “home remedies” the patient is using or may have already tried.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthcare providers are encouraged to attend Marshallese community events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This helps U.S. providers to familiarize themselves with the Marshallese culture, which may improve their rapport with the patient.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some Marshallese patients observe the provider’s body language and tone of voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language barriers lead patients to observe other ways in which a provider may communicate (eg., nonverbals).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don’t ask the patient <i>why</i> they are at the appointment. Rather, ask something like “What can we help you with today?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking “why” can be offensive. Some patients may feel unwanted, discriminated against, or may think that the service provider is not prepared or have time for them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Marshallese are very private people and do not speak of private matters in front of people of the opposite gender or someone with whom they have not yet built trust or relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider, patient, and CHW or interpreter should all be the same gender, whenever possible. If not, the patient may not be as open and may not share private information.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provider should apologize to the patient before performing the physical exam. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> These behaviors communicate respect and cultivate trust.

What can a healthcare provider say to a Marshallese patient to make the patient feel more comfortable?

- Say “*iakwe*” [pronounced YOK-way] at the start of the appointment.
 - “*lakwe*” is the Marshallese word for hello. Saying this simple phrase shows the patient that the provider cares enough about the patient to learn something about their language and culture.
- Introduce yourself, ask their name, and thank the patient for attending the appointment.
 - This helps to cultivate rapport. Talking about non-medical matters shows that the provider cares about the patient on a more personal level.

What services can a healthcare facility, hospital, or clinic provide to encourage the Marshallese population to seek healthcare when ill?

- A Marshallese community health worker (CHW) should be present at the facility and available during the patient’s entire visit.
 - A CHW can interpret both spoken language and non-verbal cues between the patient and provider, which can help break down the language barrier. The CHW should also be present for the entire visit, including check-in or registration, completing paperwork, the appointment, making follow-up appointments, filling prescriptions, and the payment process, as these procedures may be conducted differently in the U.S. as compared to the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

What should healthcare providers understand about Marshallese family relationships when taking a family health history?

- Marshallese families are often large and may include extended family as well as non-biological members.
 - When asked about family members, Marshallese patients may provide information about individuals who are not blood relation to them.
- They may use the words, such as “brother” or “sister” to describe their siblings, cousins, as well as close friends. Similarly, when asking about the patient’s parents, the patient may be referring to an aunt or uncle who provide parental roles.
 - Because of this, the exact biological relationship should be explicitly explained when taking a family health history.

What should healthcare providers understand about Marshallese culture in order to better serve their Marshallese patients?

- The Marshallese value a healthcare provider who attends events in the Marshallese community and attempts to meet them before they are in a healthcare setting.
 - This will help the community build trust in the providers and be more comfortable seeking healthcare at American facilities.
- Marshallese people are very private and may not provide accurate or thorough information when questioned about their personal and family health histories.
 - The provider should explain why they are asking these questions and how they pertain to the patient’s health in order to obtain the most accurate information.

REFERENCE:
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