



QUICK REFERENCE FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS INTERACTING WITH AMERICAN INDIAN (NATIVE AMERICAN; FIRST NATION) PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

For more complete information on interacting with American Indian (Native American; First Nation) patients, please see the complete version of the *Guidelines For Health Care Providers Interacting With American Indian (Native American; First Nation) Patients And Their Families*. This Quick Reference is meant to assist Health Care Workers in Emergency Situations.

<p>GENERAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information in this document is general and is applicable to all communities of Native Americans. In the United States, there are more than 500 nations of Native Americans, each having their own separate customs, language, culture, set of beliefs and religious practices. There is no single “Native American Religion”, or church hierarchy. There is no central figure like Moses, Jesus, Muhammad or Buddha, nor is there a central holy book in Native American Religious tradition. It is an oral tradition that is passed down from generation to generation, based on certain guiding principles that are internalized from childhood and are an integrated part of each person's life. ▪ There are many Native Americans who follow traditional customs and spiritual beliefs. There are also many Native Americans who combine their traditional set of beliefs and religious practices within the framework of Christianity and would want both traditional and Christian religious traditions while in the hospital. ▪ Decisions will be put off if agreement cannot be reached. Dissension will dictate that one needs to proceed with caution and take time to reflect in order for everyone to come to “one mind”, “one accord” and/or “one decision”. ▪ Many traditional Native Americans believe that illness comes from supernatural forces. Examples are: the Cherokee believe animal spirits bring illness when hunters do not pay proper respect; other tribes believe illness is caused through an individual's bad actions; Iroquois believe illness is caused by unfulfilled desires and dreams; Inuit believe illness can be the result of sins committed by ancestors; and others believe illness occurs through contact with evil spirits. Serious illness may be the result of “soul loss”, in which evil spirits, especially those of the dead, capture the sick person's soul when it is out of his or her body during sleep. A diagnosis of soul loss denotes critical illness. This patient may have a wasting disease, be delirious, unconscious, or in a coma. Curing takes place through rituals that restore the sick person to balance and harmony. Health and healing are built on the foundation of relationship and the interconnectedness of life. ▪ Many Native Americans today will call upon both modern medicine and traditional healing ceremonies to achieve wellness. ▪ Greet with a gentle handshake. Do not look straight in the eyes, especially Elders. Hugs and touching are rarely done. Do not initiate. ▪ Many Native Americans have items that they consider sacred. They may be stones, feathers, antlers, fur, claws, or pouches of cloth or leather. Do not touch sacred items. In an emergency, keep sacred items with the patient when at all possible. ▪ Ask permission before taking any photographs. If taking X-Rays, CT-Scans, MRI's or any other type of imagery take time and explain the procedure. ▪ If the person is in need of an amputation of a body part, ask what their tradition is and what they may require afterwards for the body part that is removed. Some may request that the body part be blessed and then followed by cremation in order to be buried with them at the time of death or they may need it to be buried soon after the surgery if the body part is not being cremated. ▪ Patients may deny their pain, or decide not to talk about it because it is hard to accept that their bodies are failing them. ▪ Patients may not believe in medication due to their belief that the Creator will heal them through traditional healing practices.
<p>GENDER ISSUES/ BODY EXPOSURE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Native Americans are a modest people. Try to be sure their bodies are not exposed to others. ▪ When possible, provide male doctors and nurses for male patients and female doctors and nurses for female patients.
<p>BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS</p>	<p>Most Nations allow blood transfusions. In general, Navajos do not.</p>
<p>FAMILY ISSUES</p>	<p>Community and relationships are important. Family includes many extended family members and friends and/or an entire clan. Elders are respected and listened to when decisions are being made.</p>
<p>DIETARY ISSUES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fasting is a traditional part of preparation for rite of passage ceremonies and for spiritual discernment. Although a person who is ill should be encouraged to eat, family members and others may be fasting on behalf of the person. Sometimes fasting is a part of body healing, as a cleansing of toxins. ▪ Native Americans have preference for certain traditional foods during ceremonial times. These may be requested, especially particular teas.
<p>END OF LIFE CARE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintaining a terminal patient on artificial life support for a prolonged period in a vegetative state is not encouraged. At the end of life, prayers may be said and family is encouraged to be present.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A patient who is nearing death often reports visits and conversations with deceased relatives. Usually the patient will request traditional foods and it is very important that the family obtain these foods for the patient so that they are ready for their journey. Native Americans use food to honor the dying and deceased where other people may use flowers. Patients may also request special prayers from their tradition and if they are Christian they may also want to have their pastor or priest present.
ORGAN DONATION/RECEIPT OF TISSUE OR ORGANS	Organ transplantation, both donating and receiving, is generally allowed. There is a special effort to get Native Americans to sign up as donors due to difficulty in matching tissue. In general, Navajos do not allow organ donation.
AUTOPSY	Autopsy is not encouraged among traditional people. However, it is permitted if required by law. Modern families may desire autopsy for health care information.
CARE OF THE DECEASED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The body should not be moved until the family has been consulted about their particular tradition. Special clothing may be brought to dress the body in before it leaves the hospital, or the family may request that their loved one be covered at the time of death by a blanket. Particular ceremonial objects may be placed on the body. It is often customary for a family member or the spiritual leader to cut a piece of hair from the deceased. This is for some tribes especially important at the death of a child. Traditional persons do not generally desire embalming, and may require significant lengths of time to be with the body. Traditional families may wish to have the body near them for as long as 4 days. It is critical to talk to the family about their particular tribal tradition. For example, Navajo people destroy the clothes and possessions of the dead person and are careful never to speak the person's name because to do so might attract his/her wandering ghost or spirit. Some tribes will make special ceremonies of giving away the deceased persons possessions and will repeatedly speak the name of the person after death as part of ceremony. If the death is subject to investigation by the local Medical Examiner or Coroner, follow established procedures. Be sure to notify the Medical Examiner or Coroner of any special religious beliefs or family requests.
RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Sacred Objects/Healing Rituals</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A Medicine bundle, medicine bag is a collection of objects with sacred meaning and spirit power, which is wrapped in an animal skin or in a cloth. ✓ Smudging with sage, cedar, and sweet grass may be desired. To smudge is to spread the smoke of burning herbs over a person, space, or object for purification. This ceremony usually involves a feather or fan. If smoke is not allowed, smudging the oils for sage, cedar and sweet grass may be used as a substitute. ✓ Feather ceremonies might involve the sweeping of a person or body with feathers, the tying on of feathers, or the handling of feathers in prayer. ✓ Face painting may be a part of a ceremony to prepare a person for surgery or death, or may be a part of the care of the body after death. ✓ Healing herbs, oils, roots are often used for spiritual and emotional healing as well as a part of the treatment of the physical condition ✓ Pipe ceremony may be performed by a spiritual leader either in the hospital or outside on behalf of the patient. ✓ Chantways and songs with drum or rattle are a daily part of healing for many Native Americans. The visit by tribal singers is emotionally very healing for the patient. ✓ Medicine lodge or inipi lodge is a purification ceremony that takes place in a special "sweat lodge." It involves prayers and the calling of spiritual ancestors for help. This ceremony may be requested before a medical treatment such as surgery. If the patient is unable to participate, the spiritual leader may perform this ceremony on their behalf. ✓ Crystals and sacred stones may be used as part of healing. Crystals may be laid on a person's body, or may be held for prayer. When a family is having a ceremony performed – leave the room and provide privacy unless the family asks you to stay. Providing a room for ceremonial purposes would be helpful and afford families with their needed privacy.
CONTACT INFORMATION & RESOURCES ON THE WEB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sr. Patricia Mulkey, Anawim Center, 773/561-6155 Rev. Michelle Oberwise Lacock, Advocate Health Care, 630/990-5637 Ken Scott, Executive Director, American Indian Health Service of Chicago, Inc., 773/883-9100, 773/883-0005 Search the Web for the specific community for whom you are providing care.