



# *TIPS for Respecting the Patient & Family Cultural Beliefs*

**Each of us comes from a unique cultural background. This greatly influences our choices and preferences for everything from what we eat to how we see the world. As caregivers, we need to respect our patients' choices and preferences to best meet their individual needs. The best way to learn about a person is to ask them and then listen to her/his life story.**

## **A few things to remember:**

- When you meet with a new patient and/or family ask, “Are there any special customs or beliefs that I should know about when I take care of you?” In some cultures, talking openly about death is not acceptable. Understanding that talking about death may cause the patient and/or family distress.
- If the patient and/or family members do not speak English, use a medical interpreter. A family member should not serve as the interpreter; it could be embarrassing or upsetting to translate personal information.
- Be careful not to assume a person who belongs to a particular cultural group follows that culture's usual practices and beliefs. Always ask about the individual's beliefs, practices, and preferences.
- Communication styles and preferences for medical decision making in the family may vary among cultural groups. Respect the patient's and/or family's decision-making even if it is different from yours.
- The use of touch may be uncomfortable for some Individuals. Always ask before touching as touch may not be appropriate in some cultures. Ask before holding a hand or giving a hug.
- Some cultures have specific practices and rituals for end-of-life care and for expressing grief. It is important to respect and honor those practices.

Other HPNA TIPS Sheets are available at [www.hpna.org](http://www.hpna.org)

## References

*Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2005.

Lum H, Arnold R. Asking about cultural beliefs in palliative care. *Fast Facts and Concepts*. June 2009; 216. Available at: [http://www.eperc.mcw.edu/fastfact/ff\\_216.htm](http://www.eperc.mcw.edu/fastfact/ff_216.htm). Accessed November 13, 2009.