

Recommendations for GPs from women from refugee backgrounds

The following quotes and recommendations are taken from the 'Refugee Women as Health Leaders Project' that was developed by refugee women engaged as Health Development Workers in consultation with women from their respective communities at the Mater UQ Centre for Integrated Care and Innovation. They are intended to assist and inform health services and policy makers about the health needs of women from refugee backgrounds and contribute to building the skills and capacity of the health sector.

Burundi community

I trusted my GP so much because, he treated me nicely starting with few jokes as conversation starter which has made me to forget that I was sick and I felt more confident with my poor English, he listened to me carefully by using simple English when he asked me how I felt.

Recommendation: Establish good relationships and rapport by treating patients with dignity and respect and explaining things carefully.

Afghan community

Understanding a new language is definitely a significant stress and impacts on every aspect of life. Every health professional should understand this issue. As one woman said:

I don't understand the language here which means I can't gain success in this country. I seek help from my children for basic interpreting and translations of letters. I can't ask them all the time they get annoyed and won't answer me all the time. Then I get cross with them and angry at myself, then the depression starts and I ask why I even came to this strange country.

Recommendation: Build health service capacity by increasing primary care cultural awareness and sensitivity, especially for the front desk staff at the GP. They are the first people who clients encounter and colour the approach to the health system.

Burmese community

When I got my visa to come to Australia, I felt like I was top of the world. When I lived in camp I was independent but I arrived in Australia, I had to depend on other people start day one till now. Every day I need to worry about everything. I couldn't sleep for most nights. I asked by myself, why I came to Australia..... May be I should go back to my camp but I have no house over there.

Recommendation: Be aware of people's expectations and settlement experiences. Advocate for the needs of the patients as required and provide translated information in the appropriate language.

Congo

I witnessed a woman die with cancer because of the long waiting period to see a specialist Doctor. The lady was suffering from really bad stomach cramps so she went to see a General Practitioner (GP) and was referred to a Gynecologist. When it was finally her turn to see the specialist doctor for a check-up, she undertook a few tests and later on found out during her consultation that she had cancer and it was now too late to seek any treatment because the cancer had already spread around her whole body. A few days later she passed away.

From hearing that story, many women in my community are now very scared if they have pain in the abdominal area and are unsure if they'll see a specialist doctor in time in case if the pain was caused by internal cancer. They fear that due to long waiting lists it might also be too late for them to seek any treatment before having a consultation with a specialist doctor.

Recommendation: Build the community's health literacy around particular illnesses including cancer and cancer prevention.

Rwandan community

Why sign a consent form? It is unpleasant and worrying! It is like the health professional declines his responsibility on risks involved in case the procedure does not succeed.

Recommendation: Promote the use of professional interpreters in all medical central and pharmacies so that they can explain things very clearly to the patient and there is less confusion.

KEY MESSAGES TO HEALTH PRACTITIONERS

- Simplify and start positive -try to normalise any difficulties
- Every word from the doctor is taken seriously so consider the message that will be followed literally. Warnings may cause undue worry.
- Ensure you let people know that all information is kept confidential
- Take time to Build trust and rapport – be respectful and gentle
- Always offer hope