Native American Culture

When caring for a Native American patient, nurses and other healthcare personnel should be aware of cultural differences, in an effort to provide the highest level of culturally competent care. In Native American culture, direct eye contact can be perceived as disrespectful, and strong handshakes are considered offensive. Although these practices differ from traditional American etiquette, it is important to respect the patient’s beliefs. Practitioners should also be aware that Native Americans do not typically participate in organ or blood donation, as these practices are viewed as not only a physical sacrifice, but a spiritual sacrifice as well. When receiving care, Native American patients may request or prefer the use of a tribal shaman, instead of standard, western medicinal practices.



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No Direct Eye Contact
No-sign Direct Eye Contact
In Native American culture, direct eye contact can be perceived as disrespectful or an invasion of the individual’s privacy. The nurse should practice culturally competent care by respecting the patient’s cultural beliefs and traditions regardless of cultural differences.

No Organ Donation
No-sign Organ Charity
Organ donation is not common among Native Americans. Members of this culture believe that organ donation is not only a physical sacrifice, but a spiritual sacrifice as well.

No Blood Donation
No-sign Blood Charity
Typically, members of the Native American culture do not donate blood.

Strong Handshakes Offensive
Offended by Strong Handshake
In the Native American culture, strong handshakes are considered offensive. Instead, members of this culture greet people by lightly touching the other person on their hand.

Tribal Shaman
Tribal Shark-man
In times of illness or injury, Native Americans may request or prefer the use of a tribal shaman instead of the western medicinal practices offered in the hospital. A tribal shaman may also be called a medicine man or woman.

Navajo Mother Massage Newborn
Navajo Mother Massaging Newborn
After giving birth, a Navajo mother will massage her newborn baby. This tradition acts as one of the first bonding experiences between mother and child.

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