

Cultural Awareness Tip Sheet

Caring for Dutch (Netherlands) Patients

For EMS & Emergency Department Staff

What to Expect

- **Direct, concise communication** — patients may speak plainly or challenge recommendations.
- **Calm demeanor** — even with serious symptoms; do not equate calm with low acuity.
- **High value on autonomy** — strong expectation of informed consent and shared decisions.
- **Conservative care background** — fewer tests, imaging, and antibiotics are typical in their home system.

Key Practice Considerations

Assessment

- Ask targeted follow-up questions; symptoms may be under-described.
- Use objective findings to guide acuity, not emotional presentation.

Communication

- Explain **what you're doing and why** (briefly and clearly).
- Frame decisions in terms of **risk vs. benefit**, not routine or policy.
- Expect and welcome clarifying questions.

Treatment & Disposition

- Patients may question:
 - Imaging “to rule out”
 - Broad lab panels
 - Admission vs. discharge
- Provide rationale tied to **patient safety** and **U.S. standards of care**.

Consent & Refusals

- Refusals may be thoughtful and informed, not impulsive.
- Clearly document:
 - Risks explained
 - Patient understanding
 - Patient decision

Do / Avoid

DO

- ✓ Be factual and transparent
- ✓ Offer choices when clinically appropriate
- ✓ Explain delays or wait times
- ✓ Respect patient independence

AVOID

- ✗ Interpreting questions as noncompliance
- ✗ Overly emotional or vague reassurance
- ✗ Assuming silence = agreement
- ✗ Minimizing concerns due to calm behavior

Bottom Line

Dutch patients value **clarity, efficiency, evidence, and autonomy**.
Short explanations build trust and speed care.

References

1. **van der Heide, A., et al. (2017).**
“Patient-centered care and shared decision-making in the Netherlands.”
BMC Health Services Research, 17: 693.
 - Discusses Dutch patients’ expectation for involvement in care decisions and preference for collaborative doctor–patient communication.
2. **Scheepers, R., et al. (2015).**
“Cultural aspects of health communication in Dutch hospitals.”
Patient Education and Counseling, 98(11), 1383–1390.
 - Highlights direct communication, patient engagement, and the value placed on autonomy and transparency.
3. **European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies – Health System Review: The Netherlands (2020).**

- Notes egalitarian clinician–patient relationships, shared decision-making, and patient expectation for clear explanations.
<https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/i/health-system-review-netherlands-2020>
- 4. **van der Veen, R., & van der Heide, A. (2016).**
“Communication styles and patient participation in Dutch healthcare.”
International Journal of Integrated Care, 16(4), 1–10.
 - Emphasizes Dutch patients’ preference for clarity, directness, and asking questions regarding care rationale.
- 5. **World Health Organization (WHO) – Netherlands Country Profile (2020).**
 - Confirms cultural emphasis on patient autonomy, direct communication, and shared decision-making.
<https://www.who.int/countries/nld>