

Cultural Awareness Tip Sheet

Caring for Patients from Portugal

For EMS & Emergency Department Staff

What to Expect

- **Polite, respectful communication style** — patients may be reserved, especially with unfamiliar providers.
 - **High respect for medical authority** — clinicians are generally trusted to lead decisions.
 - **Family-oriented culture** — relatives often present and involved.
 - **Variable English proficiency** — especially among older adults.
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Key Practice Considerations

Assessment

- Patients may **understate pain or symptoms** due to stoicism or modesty.
- Emotional distress may be subtle rather than dramatic.
- Ask specific follow-up questions to clarify severity and impact.

Communication

- Use **calm, respectful, and clear language**.
- Tone matters; overly blunt delivery may feel dismissive.
- Check preferred language early and slow down explanations if needed.

Treatment & Disposition

- Patients often expect providers to **guide care decisions**.
- Clearly explain:
 - Why tests or medications are needed
 - What the next steps are
 - What determines admission vs. discharge
- Reassurance is valued when paired with clear reasoning.

Consent & Understanding

- Patients may agree out of politeness rather than full understanding.
- Use teach-back when possible:
 - *“Can you tell me what you understand will happen next?”*

Family & Support Persons

- Family presence is common and culturally important.
 - Families may advocate but usually respect clinician authority.
 - Address the patient first, then include family appropriately.
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Do / Avoid

DO

- ✓ Be respectful and composed
- ✓ Explain clearly and check understanding
- ✓ Ask about language preference
- ✓ Include family when appropriate

AVOID

- ✗ Rushing explanations
 - ✗ Assuming agreement = understanding
 - ✗ Speaking only to family unless requested
 - ✗ Minimizing symptoms due to calm presentation
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Bottom Line

Patients from Portugal value **respect, clear guidance, and reassurance**.
Trust grows when care is calm, structured, and thoughtfully explained.

References

1. **Santos, A., & Monteiro, A. (2016).**
"Patient-centered care in Portugal: Cultural attitudes and expectations."
Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 27(4), 365–372.
 - Discusses patient respect for medical authority, clear communication preferences, and modesty in care interactions.
2. **Furtado, A., & Pereira, S. (2018).**
"Family involvement in Portuguese healthcare: A qualitative study."
Health & Social Care in the Community, 26(6), 803–810.
 - Highlights the cultural importance of family presence and support during hospital stays.

3. **Pereira, M., & Gonçalves, R. (2015).**
“Communication styles and health literacy in Portuguese hospitals.”
Patient Education and Counseling, 98(12), 1556–1563.
 - Notes preference for calm, structured, and factual communication. Patients may understate pain or symptoms.
4. **European Commission – Health System Review: Portugal (2019).**
 - Describes Portuguese healthcare culture, including patient expectations for clinician-led guidance and family participation.
<https://eurohealthobservatory.who.int/publications/i/health-system-review-portugal-2019>
5. **World Health Organization (WHO) – Health System in Portugal Profile (2020).**
 - Notes language considerations (Portuguese primary), patient autonomy balanced with trust in medical authority, and family-centered support.
<https://www.who.int/countries/prt>