

Creating a Culturally Sensitive Holiday Season

In Minnesota, the final months of the year are filled with many cultural events and celebrations. While many of us look forward to our own traditions and festivities, it is important to recognize and respect the cultural traditions of both patients and staff during the holiday season.

The work force of many health care organizations is made up of a broad spectrum of cultural, national, ethnic, and religious traditions, and the task of fostering an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion can be challenging.

The holiday season often poses a particular challenge for managers in health care settings. Over the span of just a few short weeks, many of the world's religious and ethnic groups traditionally celebrate one or more days of spiritual or cultural significance.

The subtle task of acknowledging all of these holidays with equity, fairness, and respect – and ensuring that no one feels left out or slighted in the process – can be a bit overwhelming. Here are some guidelines to help you steer your organization through the

holiday season with sensitivity, cultural awareness – and a sense of festive fun.

- **Assemble a diverse holiday planning committee.**

One way to make sure that your organization's holiday plans meet the needs of your multicultural staff is to recruit a team of



employee representatives to help lead the planning process. By bringing together team members who represent an array of faiths, ethnicities, and cultural traditions, you'll stand a much better chance of forging a holiday observance plan that's truly inclusive.

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- **Be flexible, fair, and consistent in planning a holiday work schedule.**

Well before the holiday season kicks off, solicit input from your team about their scheduling needs. Establish a set of guidelines that all employees must follow when requesting alternative hours or absences. This will help you be as equitable as possible in allotting holiday time off.

- **When appropriate, acknowledge multiple traditions.**

Your first concern during the holiday season is making sure that no one feels left out or slighted. However, the truly diverse workplace goes beyond that, making sure that everyone feels respected and celebrated. You can help embrace diversity by asking staff to share their traditions with the group. For example, you can host a multicultural potluck or ask employees from different backgrounds to decorate holiday bulletin boards in the staff lounge

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on a rotating basis during each week of a holiday month.

- **Non-specific themes work best.** Holiday season sensitivity means that your organization does not impose or endorse a certain way of celebrating the holidays. At the same time that you take every opportunity to honor or acknowledge multiple traditions, it's probably safest to stick with more generic choices when it comes to workplace decorations, music, activities, and so on. For example, winter-themed décor and festivities are usually a safe bet.
- **Don't forget to have fun.** It's easy to get so caught up in the process of treading cautiously through the holidays that you

forget to appreciate the shared joy of the season. Talk openly to your staff about your organization's commitment to diversity. Create policies that clearly demonstrate respect for all traditions. As long

as you approach the challenges of the season with a mindset of sensitivity and awareness, your team won't have to forego any of their hard-earned holiday fun.

Some cultural celebrations happening this holiday season:

December 6 – St. Nicholas Day
Visit of St. Nicholas to children, celebrated by European cultures

December 16-24 – Hanukkah
Jewish Festival of Lights

December 16-24 – Las Posadas
Mexican celebration of the Nativity

January 1 – Karen New Year

January 3 – Mawlid Nabi
Somali celebration of the birthday of the Islamic prophet Muhammad

January 6 – Epiphany
Christian celebration of the visit of the Three Wise Men

January 13 – Lohri
Harvest Festival of Punjab

January 13-16 – Pongal
Hindu festival, marking the beginning of the sun's six-month movement northward

CLINICAL CORNER

Adult Vaccination Resources from the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC)

New Adult Vaccination Web Page

The IAC's Immunize.org web site provides access to practical and clinically relevant information about vaccinating adults. The new page brings together resources from multiple sources, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Vaccine Advisory Group, state health departments, professional societies, medical journals, and the IAC.

[More>>](#)

Vaccinate Adults Publication

Every issue includes the [Ask the Experts](#) feature in which CDC

experts answer challenging and timely questions about vaccines and their administration, and copyright-free print materials from IAC that can be distributed to clinic staff and patients.

[More>>](#)

2014–2015 Influenza Vaccine Information Statements in Many Languages

Translations of these federally required documents are available in many languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Hmong, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese. [More>>](#)

Using Standing Orders for Administering Vaccines: What You Should Know

This handout answers frequently asked questions about using standing orders for administering vaccines. [More>>](#)

It's National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW)!



National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) is December 7 – 13, 2014

NIVW is a national observance established to highlight the importance of continuing influenza vaccination. Check out the CDC collection of NIVW resources including customizable fliers and posters, and an animated web graphic. [More>>](#)

NEWS AND RESOURCES

U.S. Life Expectancy Keeps Rising, Racial Gap at Record Low

A recent [Medscape article](#) highlights the findings of a National Vital Statistics Report that life expectancy at birth has increased for most Americans, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity.

The increase in life expectancy in 2009 over 2008 stems from decreases in death from heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries, stroke, and chronic lower respiratory diseases, the report notes.

By race, between 2008 and 2009, life expectancy increased 0.5 years to 74.5 years for the black population, and 0.3 years to 78.8 years for the white population. “The difference in life expectancy between the white and black populations was 4.3 years in 2009, a historically record-low level,” the report notes.

[Full report](#) (63-page PDF)

Spoken Language Health Care Interpreter Project Update

The Minnesota Department of Health’s Spoken Language Health Care Interpreter Project recently conducted a survey to gather information from members of the medical interpreter community and those who work with medical interpreters. The survey, which ended December 5, 2014, was created so that MDH can consider stakeholder perspectives as they create the report and draft bill that will be submitted to the Minnesota legislature in early 2015. For more information on the project, contact Hannah Volkman, hannah.volkman@state.mn.us

2014 Directories for Organizations Serving Refugees

Developed by [Minnesota Refugee Health Program](#).

2014 Health Resources Directory for Diverse Cultural Communities

This resource directory of low-cost and immigrant-friendly services covers Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Kandiyohi, Olmsted, Otter Tail, Ramsey, Rice, Scott, Stearns, and Washington counties. [More>>](#)

2014 Diverse Community Media Directory

A quick reference for individuals working to identify appropriate media channels that reach a broad cross section of diverse groups including populations of color, American Indians, LGBT, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees in the Twin Cities metro area and, to a limited extent, in greater Minnesota.

[2014 Diverse Community Media Directory](#) (45-page PDF)

2014 MAA-CBO Directory

A quick reference for individuals working to identify appropriate mutual assistance associations and community-based organizations that serve Minnesota’s many diverse communities.

[2014 MAA-CBO Directory](#) (45-page PDF)

Refugee Health Data Updates

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota resettled 2,141 primary refugee arrivals in 2013. Demographics, screening rates, and health summaries for 2013 primary and secondary refugee arrivals are available [here](#).

Somali, Hmong Language Online Civil Legal Help Now Available

Legal Services State Support, a project of the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition, recently announced that their client website, [LawHelpMN.org](#), now has a [Somali mirror site](#), and a [Hmong mirror site](#).

LawHelpMN.org is designed to provide information and resources to Minnesotans who have civil legal issues. The focus of the website is on low-income Minnesotans, but there are resources that are relevant for many people who have legal questions. The new sites mean that Somali and Hmong speakers are now able to navigate in their own language.

AHRQ Provides Advanced Training for Interpreters, Staff

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality has produced a TeamSTEPPS Limited English Proficiency training module, with powerpoints, trainer instructions, videos, and handouts. The modules feature two main videos — one demonstrating what can go wrong when interpreters are not integrated into the team, and another demonstrating successes. [More>>](#)

LGBT Annual Health and Well-Being Report

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) released its annual LGBT Health and Well-Being report which shows that over this past year, HHS has taken a number of important steps to continue to advance the equality, health and well-being of LGBT individuals, families and communities. [More>>](#)

EVENTS

National Influenza Vaccination Week December 7-13, 2014

The CDC's National Influenza Vaccination Week (NIVW) highlights the importance of continuing influenza vaccination. The CDC's website offers links to activities and materials to assist flu vaccination partners in their NIVW planning efforts.

[More >>](#)

Walk-in HIV Testing December 8-12, 2014 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

Open Cities Health Center
409 North Dunlap Street
St. Paul, MN 55104

In commemoration of World AIDS Day, the Open Cities Health Center

(OCHC) will offer free HIV information, resource assistance, and confidential testing for all walk-ins. For more information, contact Pete Jackson, OCHC, 651-251-5987 pete.jackson@ohealthcenter.com.

Karen New Year Celebration December 27, 2014 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.

This celebration is a time for the Karen to reflect on the success and failures of the past year and to look forward to the year ahead. This year, the event will be held at Washington Technology Magnet School, 1495 Rice Street, St. Paul, MN 55117.

[More >>](#)

Minnesota Community Health Worker Alliance 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Meets first Wednesday of every month.

The Minnesota CHW Alliance is a partnership of community health workers (CHWs) and stakeholder organizations who work together to advance the CHW field in order to achieve the Triple Aim, reduce health disparities, expand and diversify the health care workforce, and foster healthier communities.

For meeting location and other information, contact:

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Stratis Health works toward its mission through initiatives funded by federal and state government contracts, and community and foundation grants, including serving as Minnesota's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization.

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