

# SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

The healthcare system in Australia is dominated by western traditions and practices, which can be a barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples receiving optimal care. This update will highlight key cultural considerations when providing palliative care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients in a community pharmacy setting.

## Communication

Direct questioning can be seen as confrontational in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and may discourage participation. Asking open-ended questions and using a conversational style can encourage dialogue and build rapport.

## Men's business and women's business

There are strong gender roles in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture where men address 'men's business' and women address 'women's business'. Consider if it would be more appropriate for a colleague of a different gender to communicate sensitive issues.

## Family/kinship

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship systems are complex and often poorly understood by non-indigenous Australians. For example:

- > A family spokesperson (e.g. a grandmother) may be responsible for decision making for the whole family.
- > Avoidance behaviours may exist between family members as a sign of respect (e.g. a son-in-law and mother-in-law may not directly communicate with each other).
- > Family titles like 'brother' may be used for all males of the same generation.

It's important to not make assumptions around family dynamics and seek clarification where appropriate.

## Return to country

Returning to country is a practice where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples return to their homeland to 'pass on' (die). This is an incredibly significant cultural practice that is believed to be important in the journey of the spirit into the next world. Helping to facilitate this practice where possible is important in delivering optimal palliative care.

## Sorry business/sad news

Sorry business describes the period of mourning once a family member has passed away. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture it's generally inappropriate to mention the deceased by name or display photos of them, as it's believed that this may prevent safe passage to the spirit world. When talking about death or dying with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples it's more appropriate to use terms such as 'passed away' and 'passed on'.

## Useful Resources

- > [Gwandalan palliative care](#)
- > [Deadly Pharmacists \(free module hosted by PSA\)](#)

With thanks to Dilaan Selva-Nayagam for contributing

## For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medicines management in the setting of Palliative Care and is based on critical review of available evidence. Individual patient circumstances must be considered when applying this information. Please feel free to distribute this update further to interested colleagues.