

Preface

Providing Care to Patients from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds: Guidelines to Practice was developed for Queensland Health on the basis of research conducted by the Australian Centre for International & Tropical Health & Nutrition, The University of Queensland, from November 1997 to April 1998. The Guidelines were compiled with the assistance of staff from various hospitals in South East Queensland, interpreters and consumers from various cultural backgrounds.

The research aimed to identify cultural and linguistic issues among peoples from diverse backgrounds, which affect their use of hospital services, their understanding of procedures within hospitals, and the quality of care provided to them. This data allowed us to identify relevant information for health providers in hospitals regarding cultural issues affecting the provision of care, and, on the advice of members of the Reference Committee, to develop materials for use in hospital settings.

The research follows previous work which resulted in the production of *Cultural Diversity: A Guide for Health Professionals*. This is a series of ethnic specific and life-event pamphlets for health providers whose clients include people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The profiles include generic information (phone number for TIS [translating and interpreting services], Migrant Resource Centres, etc.), general community information, and summary data from health research conducted with the communities. This material may be a useful supplement to this *Guidelines to Practice*.

Our purpose in compiling the guidelines is to address some of the issues of greatest concern to hospital staff working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, other than Indigenous Australians¹. Our goal is to enhance the delivery of health care and the quality of

¹For information on issues relating to indigenous patients, contact the Indigenous Hospital Liaison Officer at your hospital where applicable.



care to disadvantaged communities, including people from ethnic backgrounds who have difficulties in accessing conventional services because they believe them to be inappropriate and culturally- and gender-insensitive.

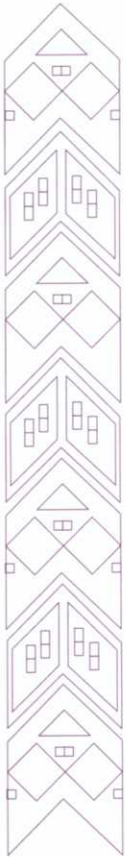
We hope to encourage greater awareness of some of the differences which you face when providing care to people from backgrounds different from your own, and greater sensitivity to the causes of problems that may arise in providing this care. We hope that by raising awareness, you will be able to develop appropriate and effective interventions to assist in the care of patients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Many of the issues raised in the *Guidelines to Practice* are issues of basic quality care, and can be equally applied to the care of people from the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. However, when language and cultural differences exist as well, these quality care issues become even more important.

The information which we have provided in the *Guidelines to*

Practice is not specific to any single cultural group, although we give examples from different cultures to illustrate various issues. We do not seek to generalise to every cultural group, nor do we wish to imply that all people from a given culture or background will act in a certain way. As in every cultural group, individual differences occur according to socio-economic status, level of education, rural or urban residence etc. It is also important to remember that on migration, people go through a transition, adopting some practices of their new country and not others depending in part on the duration of residence. Because people are variably acculturated, it is important to avoid concentrating only on the differences mentioned in the guidelines. In generalising, we hope that we have avoided creating stereotypes. The *Guidelines to Practice* provide you with a map of the kinds of issues, aspects of illness and areas of care in which culture might make a difference.

Important issues arise regarding the mental health of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These issues



have not been dealt with in this handbook, because they have been thoroughly documented elsewhere, for example in the comprehensive package *The Transcultural Mental Health Unit Resource Kit* (see Resources section).

Guidelines to Practice is intended as a reference book for use on the ward. The *Checklists for Cultural Assessment*, the companion to this handbook, was developed to provide a ready reference for improving communication, quality of care, and hence positive health outcomes for people from diverse backgrounds. Although we expect the *Checklists* will be used on a more regular basis, we hope you will take advantage of the fuller discussions in the *Guidelines*.

The handbook is aimed at hospital staff from a variety of different professional backgrounds and disciplines, and it is hoped that staff from all wards/ departments will find it useful. For some of you who use this handbook, the points which we make are reminders only - they offer you a refresher of prior knowledge. For others, especially staff who have had limited experience with people from diverse backgrounds, there will be new information. These guidelines and the checklists can be supplemented by other resource material, and we provide a list of some of these resources at the back of the handbook.

