

Identifying the cultural heritage of patients during clinical handover and in hospital medical records

TO THE EDITOR: In the recently published article by Morgan and colleagues¹ and associated podcast, the authors raised the issue of future research into the outcomes of identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in hospital. The implementation of a visual identification methodology has previously been described² and was put in place in partnership with the hospital department of Aboriginal health. The purpose of this identification initiative was to encourage all medical professionals who care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients to question what they can do to assist them while they are in hospital. We describe here the positive outcomes of this process. In addition to hospital pharmacists,² the visual alert system is also used by other departments and professionals within the hospital, such as cardiothoracic care, the emergency

department (ED), Aboriginal health, and speech pathology, as well as ward-based nursing and medical staff.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients' identification system is used by health care providers within the hospital to easily identify the patients they need to visit, to provide culturally appropriate resources and services and links to other services, and to enhance the care patients receive and enable them to remain in a caring hospital environment. At ward level, nursing and medical staff use the identification system to highlight the referral process needed to link with Aboriginal health workers — connecting the right resources to the right people. Because of the visual alert,² staff feel more aware of the cultural needs of the patient before they meet them.

Specifically in the ED, there is a system-wide approach that firstly identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients presenting to the ED using the visual alert at triage, and then implementing initiatives that aim to reduce the level of “did not wait for

treatment” episodes. The Heart and Lung Stream at St Vincent's Hospital uses the system to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients early during their admission in order to provide culturally specific education, resources and follow-up after hospital discharge.

We encourage others to explore this initiative in their hospital, together with cultural responsiveness training, to enhance the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples during and after their hospital visit.

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- 2 Sclater E, Deweerdt P, Bridle S, Welch S. How can hospitals better identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients to assist medication use? *Med J Aust* 2016; 205: 236. <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2016/205/5/how-can-hospitals-better-identify-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-patients>. ■