

# Northwest Arkansas Hospitals and Clinics Bridging Cultural Divide with Patients

McGee Meredith

## At A Glance

In 2015, over 1,200 health care professionals in Northwest Arkansas learned how to better serve Marshallese and Hispanic patients. The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Northwest created specialized training modules to help medical staff learn about the cultural and language needs of these communities. As a result, 21 health care sites improved care for 3,687 Marshallese and 60,681 Hispanic patients by hiring more interpreters, engaging community leaders, and providing health education materials in patients' native languages.



## Public Health Challenge

In Northwest Arkansas, health care professionals face challenges bridging cultural and language divides with Marshallese and Hispanic patients, a challenge also recognized by leaders in both communities. Between the 2000 and 2010 US census, the area's population of residents from the Marshall Islands increased by 324% because of better work environments and health care. The area's Hispanic population also doubled. Both groups have high rates of diabetes, obesity, and high blood

pressure but difficulty accessing medical care because of cultural and language barriers. UAMS health screenings of over 500 Marshallese adults found that 41% have diabetes (vs 9% of the overall US population), 43% have high blood pressure, and 62% have obesity. Screenings of 141 Hispanic adults found that 11% have diabetes, 39% have prediabetes, and 73% have high blood pressure or borderline high blood pressure.

## Find Out More

You can learn more about how to provide health care services that take into account the health beliefs, practices, and cultural and language needs of diverse patients by calling the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus at 479-713-8678. You can access the training modules at UAMS's continuing education portal at <https://learnondemand.org/>. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health cooperative agreement.

*Our staff is much more aware of our Hispanic and Marshallese patients and how to interact with them.*  
- Employee Education Manager, Washington Regional Hospital

### Contact

**McGee Meredith**  
UAMS Northwest

Fayetteville, AR  
Phone: 479-713-8677

### Approach

To address these issues and help local hospitals and clinics create more inclusive practices, UAMS Northwest developed three training modules for clinical staff. These modules covered general cultural competency, caring for Marshallese patients, and caring for Hispanic patients. In surveys conducted by UAMS Northwest after in-person trainings on the general cultural module, participants said they wanted more in-depth information on different aspects of care. In response, the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus designed eight additional modules on how to care for Marshallese or Hispanic patients. Topics included maternal health, mental health, and chronic disease management.

### Results

In 2015, a total of 51 in-person trainings on general cultural competency were held at 21 facilities, reaching 1,216 health care professionals. In surveys conducted 6 months after the trainings, participants were asked about any changes in their organizations as a result of the training. Improvements included increased access to health education materials in Marshallese and Spanish and the hiring of additional interpreters to ensure access to quality care in patients' native language. One hospital, its clinics, and a local hospice organization created internal committees to address diversity and inclusion, and they now require cultural competency training for all staff. The hospital and hospice organization also sought out Marshallese and Hispanic pastors and community leaders for insight on cultural norms regarding end-of-life care.

### What's Next

UAMS will continue to offer live training for at least another year, thanks to financial support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. All training modules are available through Learning on Demand, and area clinics and hospitals are provided with links to access online modules. Policy, systems, and environmental improvements within the hospitals and clinics ensure that the benefits of training continue and that new staff learn the importance of providing culturally competent care.