

# MNHS: Comparative report - Student vs. the experts

## Student example:

If the health care practitioner had paid careful attention to the medical file before the consultation, they would have seen that the patient identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Instead of raising the potential of Thalassemia, they could have focused more on the issues relevant to the patient. In particular, they could have discussed the heartburn the patient mentioned, instead of dismissing the complaint with "OK, no medications." If they had taken the complaint more seriously, they could have discussed food or drink that could be avoided, and considered changing the medication the patient has already tried (Australian Government Department of Health, 2019). Investigation into other causes, such as infection and cancer, should also have been pursued (Australian Government Department of Health, 2019). As a result, the patient would have felt that the practitioner was actively listening and engaging with her concerns.

The practitioner could also have directed the patient to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support programs, such as Koori Maternity Services (Victoria State Government, 2020). These services aim to provide a holistic approach to antenatal care, which has proven to be important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (Kildea et al., 2016). As such, these programs incorporate social, emotional, cultural and physical wellbeing of the patient.

Finally, if the practitioner might have been aware of research which demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a higher risk of prematurity and low birth weight (Ford et al., 2018). As such, they could have targeted their questions to risk factors.

## References

- Australian Government Department of Health. (2019). 56 Reflux (heartburn).  
<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/pregnancy-care-guidelines/part-i-common-conditions-during-pregnancy/reflux-heartburn>
- Ford, E. J., Cade, T. J., Doyle, L. W., & Umstad, M. P. (2018). Pregnancy risk factors associated with birthweight of infants born to Australian Aboriginal women in an urban setting - a retrospective cohort study. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 18, 382.  
10.1186/s12884-018-1946-3
- Kildea, S., Tracy, S., Sherwood, J., Magick-Dennis, F. & Barclay, L. (2016). Improving maternity services for Indigenous women in Australia: Moving from policy to practice. *MJA*, 205(8), 375-379. 10.5694/mja16.00854
- Victoria State Government. (2020). Aboriginal maternity services.  
<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/hospitals-and-health-services/patient-care/perinatal-reproductive/maternity-newborn-services/aboriginal-maternity-services>

Legend

 Good practice

 Needs improvement

 Comment

## Expert example:

The health care practitioner might have recalled studies indicating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a high-risk group for chronic *Helicobacter pylori* infection and taken the heartburn complaint more seriously. She may have considered the likelihood of low birth weights for Indigenous mothers and asked more targeted questions to identify risk factors associated with this. The average age for pregnancy for Indigenous mothers is 25 while the age for non-Indigenous mothers is 31, with fertility rates for older Indigenous mothers declining significantly beyond the age of twenty, so at 35+ the patient in this scenario is in a high-risk demographic for pregnancy issues. Aboriginal mothers are also statistically far less likely to access ante-natal care, and do so far later in their pregnancies than non-Aboriginal women. Knowing this, a health practitioner may take extra care to make the patient experience more positive, inviting, welcoming and safe, encouraging return visits.

Cardio-vascular, renal and some neoplastic pathologies are statistically far higher for Aboriginal people, so the family histories of the clients in this scenario might deserve some more detailed scrutiny in these areas. Strength-based approaches to this kind of population data can also be helpful – for example Indigenous childhood diabetes is lower than mainstream rates, as well as breast cancer and some other cancers. Aboriginal people are also statistically more likely to be non-drinkers than non-Aboriginal people are, as was the case in this scenario. This kind of data can help practitioners maintain respect and an accurate view of Aboriginal people based on reality rather than deficit-focused data and negative stereotypes. There is significant data showing a correlation between cultural/land connection and improved Indigenous health outcomes, so acknowledging and affirming culture is also a good practice that can be informed by familiarity with (and application of) Indigenous health research.

While both highlight the need to take the heartburn complaint more seriously, the expert response includes a specific condition that is relevant to the patient to justify the concern.



This is a key difference - the expert response discusses statistics around the pregnancy risks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which the student response fails to include.



Instead of discussing accessing ante-natal care, the student response focuses on the need for holistic care.



This is another detail overlooked in the student response.



The student response did not consider these factors either.



This is similar to the student response's discussion of holistic care.



Awareness of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, Indigenous Australians' Health Programme, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework, and Closing the Gap Targets may have helped convince the doctor in this scenario of the importance of mandated policy around Indigenous identification and delivering the appropriate model of care. For example, the doctor may have enquired as to whether the patient had been put in contact with the Aboriginal Health Worker at the hospital to ensure her needs were being met. She may also have referred the patient to local Indigenous health initiatives and support groups in her area.

The student response also refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support programs, but lacks the detail of the expert response

