

Applying a diversity lens to consumer-centred care



Tiam is 66 years old and has been living in Australia for 5 years. He arrived as a refugee after him and his family fled Myanmar because of religious and cultural persecution. He belongs to the Chin community and has strong connection to the local church. While at church he speaks with Kham a Chin community member who helps people with medical, education and other types of support as he has good English. Kham asks how Tiam is doing. Tiam says “the doctor didn’t fix my shoulder, it still causes me pain, I do these moves with my shoulder, but I don’t know why. I have to go back to the doctor again, but she didn’t fix it last time, so why go back?” Tiam hands Kham a letter and asks what it says. Kham explains the letter is asking if Tiam would like to say if happy he is with the doctor or say how things could be better. Tiam asks why they are asking this and that he doesn’t want trouble. Kham explains that the organisation wants to hear what they are doing well and what they can do better. He says, it should be safe, but I can find out more if you like. Kham also offers to attend the next appointment which Tiam agrees to.

When Tiam and Kham arrive for the appointment, they are met by the interpreter who has been to Tiam’s previous appointments. Jenny takes all three of them into a room. Kham introduces himself as a friend and community support. Jenny Kham how Tiam has been managing the exercises. The interpreter translates the question for Tiam; he asks Kham to tell Jenny what he told him at church. Jenny listens to what Kham tells her and then explains that the movements she gave Tiam are part of an exercise routine quite normal in physiotherapy and by doing them over a period of time it should strengthen and improve Tiam’s shoulder. The interpreter translates this for Tiam.



Tiam and Kham discuss what Jenny has said and Kham tells Jenny that physiotherapy isn’t something Chin people know about and Tiam thought he would come to the doctor, and it would be fixed. Jenny then spends time talking to Kham about her job, how the exercises can help and says if Tiam continues to see her she can measure if the exercises are helping and if not make changes. The translator relays the conversation to Tiam. Jenny asks Tiam to show her the exercises so she can see if they are helping. When he finishes the exercises, Jenny asks Kham if he knows how long Tiam has been in pain or what could have caused it. Kham looks to Tiam, and the interpreter ask him. The interpreter says, “Tiam worked very hard as a farmer, but the military would also make him do forced labour, it was very tough work, he also was a very good wrestler, he won many competitions maybe all these things.” Jenny thanks Tiam and Kham for coming and arranges another appointment, she tell Kham it was very helpful having him there and hopes he can also come next time.

Reflective questions

- What risk factors are present in this scenario?
- How would you rate Jenny’s approach to working with Tiam? What was good / what could be improved?
- Thinking about client satisfaction survey that Tiam received, what level of involvement would the organisation get from people who don’t speak English as their first language? Why is this a problem?

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Case Study Reflections

- People often associate risks factors as, Tiam not having English as a first language or not being able to read English, but the risk factor is the organisation doesn't take the right steps to effectively communicate with Tiam and they don't present information in a language, tone or context that is meaningful to him.



- People from CALD communities are often excluded from providing feedback because a diversity lens in not applied to the process – if it was there would be considerations for people who don't read English or don't read at all and how “feedback” and complaints are viewed by different cultures.
- The limited application of a diversity lens is followed through in Jenny's interaction with Tiam. She has not explained what physiotherapy is and Tiam doesn't know why he is doing exercises.
- Tiam is disconnected from the services he is receiving; he is not an active participant. There is not a partnership between him and Jenny.
- It appears Jenny is not comfortable working with an interpreter as she directs all her questions to Kham. She asks Kham questions about the potential cause of Tiam's injury that she should have asked Tiam previously. This means Tiam is not placed at the centre of his care, Jenny's approaches to her previous meetings with Tiam have not provided her with the very specific experiences that could have caused his pain. She has also missed out on great insight into what Tiam has experienced in his life.
- Often CALD communities need to rely on unpaid or overstretched community members to bridge the cultural gap. Applying a diversity lens can lessen the burden we as service providers unknowingly place on those communities.
- Seeing beyond the obvious diversity of Tiam's ethnic and cultural background and finding out about him, his life and experiences will help understand how he is in the circumstance with his shoulder, how to communicate effectively with him and how to build a partnership with him

