

# The Importance of the 'Family Meeting' in Health Care Communication with Indigenous People: Findings from an Australian Study

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*The following discussion presents findings from a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) study that documents the importance to Indigenous people of including the network of extended family and community in health care communication. In particular the discussion explores the data relating to the importance of communicating through family meetings with Aboriginal people during end-of-life care. The data was collected through a series of open-ended, qualitative interviews (n=72) conducted with a cross-section of members of the Aboriginal community and health professionals within the Northern Territory, Australia. Acknowledging Aboriginal peoples' relationship rules and communicating through family meetings are practices that demonstrate respect for Indigenous cultural processes of information sharing. Anger on the part of Aboriginal people about lack of information can be the outcome when such processes are ignored or not understood. Respecting the need to "share the story" broadly with appropriate people in the extended family and community network through family meetings is noted as vitally important in health care, especially during the dying trajectory. The discussion explores the practical issues associated with, the different reasons for, and the positive outcomes from, incorporating family meetings for Indigenous people along the illness trajectory.*

**Key words:** Indigenous health, Palliative care, Family meetings, Communication