

CARING FOR A LATINO PATIENT

What are the patterns of kinship and decision-making when caring for a Latino patient?

In the Latino culture, there is a complex relationship between health and illness, as well as the physical, mental, and spiritual parts of a person's life.

Family involvement is very important. The family centered model of decision-making is highly valued and may be more important than patient autonomy. In the Latino culture, this is called *familismo*, which is characterized by interdependence, affiliation, and cooperation.

Your patient and family members may not be assertive or aggressive when communicating with doctors and clinical staff. They may not want to have any direct disagreement. As a result, important issues and problems may not be discussed, unless you initiate a dialogue.

Respeto (respect) is an important concept in the Latino culture. Respect implies that relationships are based in common humanity, where one is required to establish respect—it is not assumed. Older patients may prefer to be called *Senor* (Mr.) or *Senora* (Mrs.) - ask your patients how they prefer to be called. To develop an effective therapeutic relationship, the healthcare provider needs to be brought into the extended family circle. This is accomplished by gaining trust and showing respect.

Tips on How to Communicate with a Latino Patient and Family

When talking with your patient and family, avoid euphemisms and technical medical terms. They do not translate well, and it makes it difficult for the interpreter to communicate. Use of clear and specific language will help the patient and family better understand health issues. As a result, the patient and family are better prepared to make important healthcare decisions.

A good strategy to learn more about your patient is to have informal conversations with the extended family. Extended family members may be approached with open ended questions. However, remember to protect the patient's health information from disclosure per HIPAA.

Rituals

Prayer and ritual may be a part of the health process for the patient and the family members. Family members may use prayer or bring special amulets and rosaries (prayer beads) while visiting.

The family members may request that they keep candles burning 24 hours a day as a way of sustaining worship. Only electric candles are permissible.