



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients' and coworkers' views, traditions, and actions. While you can use this information as a guide, keep in mind that all people within a culture are **not** the same. Be sure to ask your patients and their families about specific beliefs, practices, and customs that may be relevant and important during medical treatment and hospitalization.

When describing the Jamaican culture, the following information could apply to Jamaicans visiting from Jamaica, first generation Jamaican-Americans, or ensuing generation of Jamaican -Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all Jamaicans.



## general information

- ✓ The majority of the people in Jamaica are Christian, mainly Protestant. In addition there are sizable Jewish, Hindu and Muslim minorities.
- ✓ Most Jamaicans live on the South and Southwest side of Chicago. Many also live in Evanston and Skokie.
- ✓ Many Jamaicans are fluent in English, and most also know a dialect of an indigenous Creole language.

## *inter-personal relationships*

### **relationship roles**

- ✓ Traditionally, the household is run by the females, and the family orientation varies from matriarchal to patriarchal. Age hierarchy, however, is maintained and the elders are considered to be very important members of the community.

### **decision-making**

- ✓ Families are a very important part of the Jamaican culture and the building block of the Jamaican community. It is important to involve the Jamaican family in the vital treatment decision.
- ✓ When contemplating an important decision, family members consult with each other, and usually approach the doctor as a group, with the most knowledgeable person speaking for them.

### **conflict resolution**

- ✓ In general Jamaicans are assertive.
- ✓ Religion generally does not play a role in resolving conflicts about health matters. Generally, Jamaicans listen to the physician.
- ✓ In situations where there is a disagreement, it might be advisable to involve an unbiased third party member, or back up your position with a publication.

### **personal & cultural traditions**

- ✓ Although Chicago has a small Jamaican population, as compared to Miami or New York, the community here is close knit and supportive.
- ✓ Jamaicans enjoy music, swimming and water sports. Although many plan to stay in the United States, and an increasing number have become naturalized citizens, they keep abreast of the many facets of Jamaican life in Chicago.

### **gestures**

- ✓ In many Caribbean countries the amount of comfortable personal space is considerably less than in America.
- ✓ When dining, Jamaicans wait for everyone else to be served before eating. Likewise it is polite to stay at the table until everyone has finished eating.
- ✓ If someone wiggles their nose, it probably means that he or she is saying "What is going on here?"

*treatment issues*

**medical treatment**

- v The doctor is seen as an authority figure, therefore he/she should be the one to give any bad news. It should be delivered to the family first or to the patient, when the family is present.
- v It may be advisable to contact a family member when dealing with an older patient.
- v Jamaican patients may be superstitious about why they are ill.
- v Jamaicans like to know as much as they can about any situation and are uncomfortable with the unknown.
- v Jamaicans like to be attended to and are generally jocular and easy-going.

**emotions**

- v In general, Jamaican men and women openly express themselves.
- v Patients respond to human touch and personalized, caring attitudes.
- v Many Jamaicans are emotionally charged and talk loudly and fast, sometimes interrupting others in conversation. They are very friendly and tend to show appreciation.

**food**

- v Much of the Jamaican diet is based on seafood. They tend to eat fish during religious weeks, particularly the week leading to Easter.

- v The most popular Jamaican dishes are made of rice mixed with mushrooms, beans or just plain white rice. Jamaicans also like corn, millet, and grits (fried marinated pork served with a very spicy sauce).
- v There is no dietary restrictions for Christians, while Muslims will avoid pork and alcohol.

**glossary**

- v Most Jamaicans are fluent in English. Some also speak Patois, a modified version of English with some Creole additions.

**death**

- v Death is a very solemn event, with various traditions and rituals, depending on the religious affiliation. If a patient asks for a priest, ask to confirm the denomination.
- v Jamaicans might want to have family members and friends present.



- ▲ The name Jamaica, to the native Arawak Indians, who called it Xamayca, means island of springs.
- ▲ Although many people associate Voodoo with satanic worship, it is actually a religion that includes many aspects of Christianity.
- ▲ The stereotype of the influence of Reggae and the Jamaican accent on the culture are greatly exaggerated.

## important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year	Jan. 1	Marks the first day of the New Year.
Labor Day	Late May	Celebrates the accomplishments of the working people.
Easter	Varies '99 April 4 '00 April 23 '01 April 15	Celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Independence Day	1st Monday of August	Celebrates the Jamaican independence from Britain.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

### Sources

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