



The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients' and co-workers' 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 Portuguese culture, the following information may apply to Portuguese people visiting from Portugal, first generation Portuguese-Americans or ensuring generations of Portuguese-Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all Portuguese people.



general information

- ✓ You should use *Senhor* (Mr.) and *Senhora Dona* (Mrs.) plus the last name for men and the first for women - (**example:** Senhor Pereira, Senhora Dona Ana). It should be mentioned that non-married young ladies (until around 30 years old) should be addressed by *Menina* (instead of *Senhora Dona*) plus their first name (**example:** Menina Ana).
- ✓ You should keep your dialogue serious rather than casual, especially with older generations.
- ✓ Family members tend to be very close to each other. The role of the godparent, for example, has until today a significant importance in Portugal that is lacked in the US. The godparent is usually present in all the most important/hard moments of one's life.
- ✓ Patients may wish to have at least one family member present 24 hours a day. The community itself plays also a very important role as a support mechanism. Neighbors and friends can be expected to visit the patient.
- ✓ The majority of Portuguese are Roman Catholic (97%). Other religious denominations have no significant expression. Older generations might be expected to bring a religious icon to their room, like a rosary.

inter-personal relationships

relationship roles

- ✓ Although men are still considered to be the (main) provider, in Portuguese families women tend to be the “head of the household.” The wife or the mother, is usually the person who takes care of the family in illness or difficult times. Patients, especially in the older generation, may be more receptive to male doctors.
- ✓ Males may not accurately translate matters of a private or sexual nature to nurses and doctors especially if these are female.
- ✓ Female patients may not be comfortable with examinations by male physicians or nurses.
- ✓ “Family” is a very important institution for Portuguese. Family members may want to pamper and attend to the patient’s needs. Families tend to be very protective of the patient.
- ✓ Family members may want to be present when doctors are speaking to patients about treatments or medical progress. Nurses should show the family how to help without hindering the patient’s recovery. Doctor or nurse’s directives are usually respected and followed by the family. Families and patients appreciate (and expect) hearing the doctor’s advice and recommendations.
- ✓ The doctor is considered to be a very respected person. Portuguese families may want him or her to give the “good news” to the patient, especially if the patient is an elder one.

decision-making

- ✓ Normally, once a medical decision has been made, the patient and family will abide by their decision.
- ✓ Elders tend to lack decision-making power. It is their families who usually decide for him or her. So you should include the patients’ children, grand-children or other present relatives, concerning any treatment or medical procedure.

personal space

- ✓ Portuguese tend to stand closer together than North Americans during their conversations or in lines. Stepping back could be seen as offensive.
- ✓ Doctors are expected to shake hands with the patient and with the immediate family members, including women.

gestures

- ✓ Portuguese families may view the expression of emotions such as big laughter or loud talk, as impolite.
- ✓ They would expect nurses and doctors to behave discreetly and formally, without making strong gestures when they talk.
- ✓ In a hospital setting, Portuguese families tend to be more reserved. They tend to speak lower and sometimes almost in secret since the Hospital is a highly respected entity.
- ✓ A handshake and smile are customary when arriving and departing. Men who belong to the same family may greet each other with a kiss on the cheek, especially between brothers, cousins, and parents with their sons.
- ✓ Otherwise, men greet each other with a hand shake and a touch on the forearm or even with an embrace. Women greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. They are also expected to shake hands with the doctors.
- ✓ Eye contact is important and considered polite. Portuguese in general might express emotions through eye contact as well as touching and hugs. They often express or show appreciation with smiles and pats on the back instead of words of thanks.
- ✓ Considered a polite behavior, people are expected to rise when another person enters a room.

t r e a t m e n t i s s u e s

medical treatment

- ✓ Older patients may have tried other alternatives to the traditionally accepted medical treatment. So, it is important to ask the patient what else he/she is using to treat the illness.
- ✓ Portuguese in general, do like to be informed about the treatment procedure. Usually they respect whatever the doctor/nurse says.

responses to pain

- ✓ Responses to pain tend to vary depending mainly on gender and age. Men usually would not report or acknowledge their pain. Women, on the other hand, would not report their pain for fear of bothering the nurse. Older people tend to hide their pain and might be afraid of complaining.
- ✓ Pain in general is often expressed verbally, with facial expressions, moaning/groaning and body language.

food

- ✓ On religious holidays, Portuguese may celebrate with native dishes.
- ✓ Family members are likely to bring home-cooked meals to their patients. They may not report that fact to the nurse or doctor.
- ✓ Especially during Lent (the 40 days before Easter) on every Friday, Ash Wednesday, and Good Friday, patients can be expected to abstain from meat of all kinds except fish. In Portuguese hospitals, patients are given the option of having fish or vegetables instead of meat during these days. So, it is important to ask which foods are appropriate and if possible to include them in the diet plan.
- ✓ Bread is expected to be in every Portuguese meal - breakfast, lunch and dinner.

death

- ✓ The hospital, especially by older people, might be associated with death.
- ✓ Death is usually considered a taboo issue, when possible avoid talking about it.
- ✓ If the patient or his/his family is religious (97% of Portuguese are Roman Catholic) a priest may be requested. If the patient is dying, all family members expect to be present.
- ✓ Portuguese families tend to be emotional about death and will likely pray and cry.

important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year's Day	January 1	Marks the beginning of the now year in Western culture; is also observed by Portuguese culture.
Carnival	Variable date	The day before Lent begins.
Lent	Variable dates (the 40 days before Easter)	This marks a period of preparation and penitence before Easter.
Holy Week	Variable dates (the last week before Easter)	Marks the crucifixion, death and burial of Christ.
Easter	Variable date (usually a Sunday in April)	Commemorates the Resurrection of Christ.
Liberty Day	April 25 th	A non-religious holiday that commemorates the Revolution in Portugal, after Salazar's 40 years dictatorship.
Labor Day	May 1 st	Non-religious holiday.
<i>Corpus Christ</i>	Variable date (between May and June)	A Catholic Holiday that solemnly commemorates the institution of Holly Eucharist.
Camoës-Portugal Day	June 10 th	A non-religious holiday that commemorates the Historical Discoveries of Portugal.
Assumption Day	August 15 th	Religious holiday that celebrates the happy departure of Mary from this life and the assumption of her body into Heaven.
Republic Day	October 5 th	Non-religious holiday that commemorates the birth of the Portuguese Republic.
All Saints Day	November 1 st	A religious holiday that celebrates those who have preceded us in entry to Heaven, all the anonymous Saints.
Independence Day	December 1 st	Non-religious holiday that celebrates the political independence of Portugal from Spain.
Immaculate Conception Day	December 8 th	A religious holiday that celebrates the conception of Mary without the stain of original sin.
Christmas Day	December 25 th	Celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

g l o s s a r y

word	meaning
Sim	Yes
Não	No
Por favor	Please
Muito obrigado/a	Thank you very much
Não tem de quê	Don't mention it
Olá	Hello/Hi
Bom dia	Good Morning
Boa tarde	Good afternoon/Good evening
Boa noite	Good night
Adeus	Good-bye
Desculpe/Se faz favor	Excuse me! (getting attention)
Com licença	Excuse me (may I get past?)
Perdão	Excuse me (sorry)
Não tem importância	Never mind
Fala Inglês?	Do you speak English?
Não falo (bem) Português	I don't speak (much) Portuguese
Pode repetir?	Could you repeat?
Pode falar mais devagar	Could you speak more slowly?
Como disse	What was that?
(Não) compreendo	I (do not) understand
Compreende?	Do you understand?
Está magoado?	Is it hurt?
Está a sangrar?	Is it bleeding?
Inconsciente	Unconscious
Uma bolha	Blister
Uma Nódoa negra	Bruise
Uma Queimadura	Burn
Uma Inchaço	Swelling
Cólicas	Cramps
Está partido	It's Broken
Há quanto tempo se sente assim?	How long have you been feeling like this?
Está a tomar outros remédios?	Are you taking any medicines?
É alérgico a alguma coisa?	Are you allergic to anything?
Tem apetite?	Do you have an appetite?



Sources

Portuguese Phrase Book and Dictionary, Princeton, Berlitz, 1998

Portuguese Embassy in Washington

Conversations with Sofia Whanon, Rita Braga da Cruz and Antonio Frada de Sousa.