



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

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 Puerto Rican culture the following information could apply to Puerto Ricans visiting from Puerto Rico, first generation of Puerto Rican Americans, or ensuing generations of Puerto Rican Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all Puerto Ricans Americans.



general information

- ✓ Puerto Rico has been a US territory since the late 19th century, and Puerto Ricans have been US citizens since 1917.
- ✓ You should formally address the patients and family members, especially adults (i.e., Mr./Mrs. or Señor/Señora) and keep the dialogue serious and direct.
- ✓ Family is an integral part of the Puerto Rican culture. Patients might want to have their families present 24 hours a day.
- ✓ The majority of Puerto Ricans are Roman Catholic, although a significant number are of Protestant denominations, Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses or a new age religion called Santeria.
- ✓ Santeria, a religion with African roots, includes folk healing and tribal rituals, that co-exist with traditional Christian observances.

inter-personal relationships

relationship roles

- ✓ Traditionally the Puerto Rican culture is male-dominated, although in subsequent generation, it tends to change to the American egalitarian structure.
- ✓ Some male patients may be uncomfortable around female doctors and nurses.

decision-making

- ✓ It is important to involve the whole Puerto Rican family in all aspects of any major decision regarding the patient's health.
- ✓ Family members, consult among themselves the actions and the consequences before reaching a decision.

conflict resolution

- ✓ Puerto Ricans are assertive and fairly demonstrative when expressing emotions.
- ✓ Religion does not usually play a role when determining what is best for a patient.
- ✓ As with many other cultures, if there is a disagreement, it may be necessary to bring in an unbiased third party, or to back up your position with a publication.

gestures

- ✓ As in most Latin countries, people tend to stand close to one another in any social or even business setting. This relates to a different perspective on 'personal space,' with North Americans and many Europeans believing that people should stand about an arm's length from one another. If you tend to move away from someone from a Latin country, it could be considered as offensive or insulting.
- ✓ Men tend to smile and stare at women, which is considered acceptable, but the reverse is not.
- ✓ Puerto Ricans tend to interrupt each other frequently and are not upset when this occurs.
- ✓ If someone wiggles their nose, it probably means he or she is saying 'What's going on here?'
- ✓ You will hear restaurant patrons signal for waiters by making a 'psssst' sound.

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

medical treatment

- ✓ The doctor is seen as an authority figure; therefore he/she should give the family any bad news.
- ✓ Any bad news should be relayed to the patient and his/her family.
- ✓ Some older patients can be afraid of doctors and hospitals. In these situations it may be beneficial to contact a close relative or someone that this person trusts.
- ✓ Puerto Rican patients like to know the truth about their condition.

emotions

- ✓ Most Puerto Ricans freely express emotions.
- ✓ Puerto Ricans tend to have a happy and congenial attitude, although they can be somber about sickness or death.

food

- ✓ A delicacy in Puerto Rican cuisine is the *lechón asado* (suckling pig). Rice with peas is also very tasty and frequently served.
- ✓ *Pasteles* are made with ground green plantains, bananas and other ingredients and offer a passing similarity to tamales.
- ✓ Fried slices of plantain often accompany a meal.

death

- ✓ Many Puerto Rican patients might want to receive communion before death. You should ask the patient's family about religious preference if death is imminent, and contact a priest or a minister of a given denomination.

did you know

-  The coldest recorded temperature in Puerto Rico was 40° degrees F.
-  Puerto Rico's capital city, San Juan, was originally named Puerto Rico, and the island itself San Juan. Historians believe that the names were switched by mistake on an early map.
-  Northeastern Puerto Rico is home to a part of the Caribbean National Forest known as El Yunque. Besides Hawaii, El Yunque has the only tropical rain forest in the United States.

g l o s s a r y

word	meaning
Si	Yes
No	No
Gracias	Thank you
De nada	You're welcome
Por favor	Please
Dispenseme, Perdone Usted	Excuse me
Hola	Hello
Adios	Good bye
Como se llama?	What's your name?
bien	good
mal	bad
la madre	mother
el padre	father
mucho	a lot
el agua	water

important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year's Day	January 1	Marks the first day of a New Year.
Eugenio Maria de Hostos Birthday	January 10	Celebrates the famous advocate for Puerto Rican and Caribbean Independence.
Emancipation Day	March 22	Commemorates National Puerto Rican Emancipation Proclamation.
Easter	April 4 '99 April 23 '00 April 15 '01	Celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
Memorial Day	May 27	Celebrates the memory of all the Puerto Rican and US veterans.
Constitution Day	July 25	Commemorates the ratification of the first Puerto Rican Constitution.
Discovery of Puerto Rico	November 19	A holiday in remembrance of the first sighting of the island by Europeans.
Christmas	December 25	Celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

Sources

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