

## Hispanic Culture and Health Care

Individuals from Hispanic culture can potentially have language barriers if they speak minimal English may have a difficult time navigating the healthcare system or understanding medical information (Valses et al., 2024). Hispanic cultures are very family-oriented and like to make a collective decision as a unit rather than the individual deciding for themselves, which can influence the decision, who is involved in the plan of care organization, and their support system (Rodriguez et al., 2023). It was found that Hispanic patients find it “very important” to have providers who understand their culture to help develop a trust with the patient (Terlizzi et al., 2019). Hispanic individuals tend to have low insurance coverage options, have more potentially high- health risk jobs (Pew Research Center, 2023). In 2023, around 19% of the Illinois population identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (Illinois Department of Public Health, 2022). In Champaign County, approximately 8.6% of the population identified as Hispanic or Latino in the 2019-2023 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

A large portion of Hispanics identify as catholic or have a catholic upbringing (Pew Research Center, 2023). However, there has been a decline in Hispanics identifying as catholic and an increase in unaffiliated or agnostic (Pew Research Center, 2023). Faith and spirituality can influence health behaviors, but not everyone believes the same or has a religious affiliation, which is why it is important not to make assumptions about clients and their religious status. There are many Hispanics that use prayer and their faith in God as a primary coping mechanism (Sawyer et al., 2024). Catholicism can have a major influence over life-sustaining treatment options, organ donation, and palliative care due to morals or their faith (Da Costa, 2023). Hispanic patients might consider combining traditional healing, using folk healers, herbal remedies, or possibly spiritual rituals (Da Costa, 2023).

In the Hispanic culture, they often tend to put pain on the back burner due to beliefs that there are other priorities, such as working obligations or family responsibilities (Torres et al., 2017). There are several practices for postpartum care in Hispanic culture. The biggest being called “La Cuarentena,” a.k.a. “the 40-day postpartum period.” This is a 40-day rest and recovery period for mothers after childbirth (Holmes, 2023). The mother is encouraged to rest, avoid heavy physical activity, consume nourishing foods such as warm broth or porridge, avoid cold exposure, and rely on family support (Holmes, 2023). The new mother might use a “faja” to help provide abdominal support after birth (Holmes, 2023).

In the Hispanic culture, there are many multi-generational households. There can be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all living together in one home (Hispanic Federation, 2023). Hispanic families also have strong family bonds, loyalty, obligation, and support among extended family (Stein et al., 2023). In Hispanic cultures, the elders are highly respected and sought after for advice and cultural knowledge (Mexicada, n.d.). Younger family members are expected to treat their elders with respect, formally addressing them and treating them with dignity (Mexicada, n.d.). Elders are considered “informal leaders” in the family and have the ability to scold, direct, and have the leadership role of the family, and the family honors the elder's authority (Pelayo & Sanchez, 2017).

The traditional communicational norms for Hispanic culture are that the men usually take the dominant role and are the decision makers for the family (Pew Research Center, 2024). However, there is an increase in younger, U.S.-born Latinas becoming more involved in decision-making and pursuing careers (Pew Research Center, 2024). Providers should ask the patient directly about preferences on decision-making, allowing family or a spouse in the room, don't assume that the woman will remain silent, or that she will speak up. It can go either way.

Their care should be individualized, not stereotyped. In Hispanic culture, eye contact can be interpreted differently depending on context. Direct eye contact is generally considered respectful, unless it is overly intense, in which case it can be perceived as confrontational or disrespectful (U.S. Hispanic recruiter packet, n.d.). Nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures are heavily relied on in the Hispanic culture (Lopez, 2024).

After childbirth, the postpartum mother is encouraged to eat warm, nutrient-rich foods like broth, soup (Chicken, atole, and caldos), and teas are very common in in the 40-day post birth period, and she is encouraged to stay away from cold foods (Magellan Health, 2021). In the Hispanic culture, food is important in cultural, social, and symbolic ways. Families typically eat together to promote unity (Stein et al., 2023). Foods that help connect families to their heritage include rice, beans, corn, tortillas, and tamales. Meal times are used to strengthen bonds and represent love, care, and togetherness (Magellan Health, 2021). Patient's might become more stressed due to the disruption in family meal routines and the familiar foods. This can affect the patient's recovery (Stein et al., 2023). There can be dietary restrictions, dishes that aren't available in the hospital that align with their cultural beliefs, which can have an impact on patient comfort or engagement during their hospitalization (Hispanic Federation, 2023).

Hispanic culture has a deep influence on a woman throughout pregnancy, birth, and recovery. There is a lot of family involvement and decision-making that is made with the family, as they provide physical and mental support for the mother (Hispanic federation, 2023). Women may defer to their husband or health care professional for decision making even when they have concerns just to avoid a disagreement (Magella Health, 2021).

Nurses should practice family-centered care. The Hispanic culture has a very strong emphasis on family values, unity, loyalty, and collective decision-making (Stein et al., 2023).

When explaining care plans or discharge instructions, you should include a trusted family member to help promote understanding (Hispanic Federation, 2023). Allow flexible visitation and provide space for family members. Nurses should communicate with cultural sensitivity and respect. Ask open-ended questions, use formal titles, use a proper interpreter, be friendly, smile, and use appropriate body language and eye contact. Nurses should acknowledge and try to incorporate cultural beliefs and practices to the best of our ability. Show respect for postpartum rituals, allow flexibility for rest, modesty, and appropriate family involvement. Communicate with dietary staff and provider to accommodate with culturally familiar foods and provide education without being dismissive of their cultural beliefs.

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