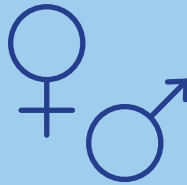


Cultural Sensitivity

Central America consists of a broad spectrum of ethnicities, cultures, religions, spiritualities, languages, accents, and histories, all of which play a significant role in the conceptualization of health and illness and in the way Canadian health care services are perceived.

Machismo is a significant cultural and social phenomenon. In Central America, males grow up in an environment in which they are encouraged to display toughness and courage, while women are expected to be nurturing and caring. Gender roles are strictly defined and crossover is not readily accepted.



**Try to accommodate the patient's preference regarding the gender of the health care professional. Otherwise, consider having a female attendant or female family member present when a male health care professional is performing an examination on a Central American female patient.*

Immigration Experience

In the 1980s a significant number of refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua came to Canada. They fled direct persecution and escaped civil war in their countries.

Impact of Immigration on Health

Central American refugees experience difficulties adjusting in Canada:

- Trauma experienced during years of civil war in their countries
- Lack of a social support network (i.e. support from their cultural, ethnic and faith communities, etc.)
- The economic recession Canada faced when the majority of them arrived
- Lack of competence in English and/or French

Most Central Americans rely on the informal support offered by family, extended family, friends, and the community rather than on formal support systems. Past experiences in their countries of origin make them fearful of systems that their communities have historically mistrusted or viewed as oppressive; as a result, they fear or mistrust services such as law-enforcement, social services, child welfare, and immigration.

Standard medical protocol might be intimidating to Central American patients. When questioning is necessary, it is best to avoid a style that may resemble interrogation.



→ The most helpful approach is to have a dialogue, in which the health care professional explains what he or she is planning to do, and guide the patient to disclose the information necessary for diagnosis.

Central American patients may have experienced state violence and endured economic hardship, physical deprivation and torture or witnessed violence against family members, friends, or neighbours in their home countries. As a result, **Central Americans' ability to trust people with 'power' (expertise) is negatively affected.** Some of them report experiencing guilt for having survived and not having been able to protect their families or for having left behind family members in a situation of danger.



**Be receptive to direct or indirect disclosure of current and/or historic violence or abuse.*

**Central Americans place great value on interpersonal relationships and prefer to consult someone with whom they have a personalized professional connection.*

Why was this infographic made?

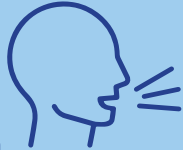
This infographic is a response to concerns expressed by health care professionals in London regarding the lack of knowledge and understanding of health care practices of different immigrant groups. We hope that this information will provide health care professionals with an increased awareness of the factors which may affect how members of a different cultural group access and respond to health care services in our community.

Communication

Many Central Americans view health care professionals as the authority with regards to their medical care, therefore challenging a health care practitioner's treatment plan is considered inappropriate. High value is placed on politeness and propriety even under stressful circumstances.

- * **For Central Americans, using a formal address is a clear way of indicating respect. Unless invited to do otherwise, it is recommended to use a formal address (Mr. or Mrs. and last name), especially when dealing with seniors or recent immigrants**

Central Americans may interpret a loud tone of voice as argumentative, hostile, disrespectful, or an attempt to violate privacy. Silence on the part of the Central American patient is likely to be a sign of lack of understanding or disagreement with the suggested treatment.



Be aware of the 'health care professional-to-patient' power dynamics when dealing with Central American patients. Acknowledge the importance of interpersonal relations based on trust and respect. If trust can be established prior to the medical consultation, compliance with a proposed treatment plan is more likely to happen.

Languages

- The primary language is Spanish
- other Central American languages:
 - Garifuna
 - Kriol
 - Mayan Languages

Religion & Spirituality

Although Catholicism remains the dominant religion, other popular churches include Anglican, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestant, Baptist fundamentalist and Evangelical.

In general, Central American culture is deeply affected by religion and spirituality, which are often expressed through religious festivals and popular devotions, including healing prayers or rituals. These are considered occasions to express beliefs and build community.

Fatalism is an important phenomenon. A patient may believe that the illness they have is the will of God as punishment for not adhering to the principles of their religion.

Good or bad health and wealth are considered part of a person's destiny. This belief system impacts people's attitudes toward treatment for critical diseases and health promotion programs in general.

- * **Acknowledging faith practices within a medical treatment plan will increase the emotional buy-in of the patient, especially when requiring invasive medical procedures.**

Family

Family is the most important social support system for Central Americans. 'Family' refers to nuclear and extended family including: grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Family connections facilitate economic survival and social adjustment to Canadian culture.

The role of the mother is influenced by **Marianismo**, which is the female counterpart to Machismo. While power and authority for the whole family reside with the father when dealing with external issues such as finances, work, education, and issues that relate to the broader community, the power and authority within the family home reside with the mother.

The mother usually feels that she is responsible for the health care of all family members and determines when someone requires external medical care or when a consultation with other family or community members is more warranted.

- * **The Central American mother will be a good resource person for the health care professional and will be quite receptive to talk about health issues of family members.**



Acknowledgement of the support that "family" provides to a Central American patient is important. Consider offering to include the patient's family in consultations on important medical matters.

Alternative Treatments

Alternative treatment practices among Central Americans in London include:

- Use of indigenous plants and herbal medicine
 - Corn is used as a diuretic and diaphoretic and it can be employed as a lymphatic cleansing remedy
 - Garlic is used to lower cholesterol and improve
- Chiropractic care (to mediate physical pain)
- Acupuncture (to relieve pain, tension headaches and migraine)
- Massage therapy (to improve mobility after an accident or injury or to deal with stress)
- Prayers (especially for serious medical conditions)
- Meditation (reducing stress-related ailments)
- Reiki (application varies from curing alcoholism, insomnia, and arthritis to migraine headaches)
- Tai Chi, yoga, and music therapy (stress reduction)
- In cases of chronic pain, ongoing sleep problems, stress and depression, Central American patients are likely to consider the use of one or more of these types of alternative treatments.



- * **Inquire about personal practices and foster flexibility in the treatment approach to include alternative practices.**