Southeastern National Tuberculosis Center's Cultural Quick Reference Guide

Dominican Republic

COMMUNICATION

Languages and Dialects

- · Official spoken language: Dominican Spanish
- People who have lived in major cities, or who have worked in areas frequented by tourists, may speak some English.

Greetings

- Handshakes are an acceptable form of greeting; smile and make eye contact as you shake hands.
- People may also exchange kisses on the cheeks when they greet one another.
- Show deference to older family members upon meeting them.
- Dominicans will greet people anytime they enter a public space (including a bus or a taxi).
- People may say saludos ('Greetings'), Buen día ('Good morning'), Buenas tardes ('Good afternoon'), or Buenas noches ('Good evening') as part of a greeting.

Names and Titles

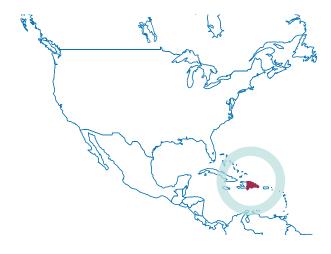
- · Address a Dominican person by an appropriate title and last name.
- If possible, use the Spanish version of a title: 'Señor' ('Mister') for men, 'Señora' ('Madam') for married women, and 'Señorita' ('Miss') for single women.

Conversation

- Dominicans stand close together while in conversation; moving away may be considered unfriendly.
- Dominicans speak very quickly: they 'swallow' syllables and drop the letter 's' at the end of words. Ask them to speak more slowly ('más despacio por favor'). Most people will be glad to accommodate you.
- Dominican Spanish is full of turns of phrase specific to people from that country – these may not translate well even to those who speak Spanish
- Dominican people may employ endearments liberally in conversation: examples include mi amor ('my love') or cariño ('darling').
- Generally speaking, people from the Dominican Republic are uncomfortable with attempts to accelerate a decision-making process.

Non-Verbal Signals

- Dominicans may 'point' by aiming their pursed lips in a particular direction.
- A Dominican person may 'scrunch up' their nose to indicate that they did not hear you.
- Dominican people may often say 'no' in gesture form, 'wagging' an index finger from side to side.



CULTURAL NORMS

Patient and Provider Interaction

- Dominican people do not adhere to standard concepts of time and punctuality. For example, 'ahorita' ('now') could also refer to tomorrow or to an unspecified time in the future.
- To a Dominican person, maintaining eye contact indicates interest in what is being said. If you must look down at your notes during a conversation, mention your reason for looking away.
- Dominican patients expect a formal clothing style and careful grooming from their medical professionals.

Behavior in Clinic

Respect is important to Dominican culture; Dominican people avoid doing anything to cause another person to 'lose face'.

- Dominican people prefer providers who spend a considerable amount of time with a patient; they prefer providers to listen carefully to the patient in clinic.
- Ask adult patients which family members they would like to include in discussions concerning care or decision making.
- Although the father may be the primary decision maker, the mother or grandmother may provide the majority of care to the diagnosed person.
- To avoid appearing rude, patients may indicate agreement even when they disagree or do not understand.
- Personal relationships are valued above being on time. Healthcare providers may want to discuss time schedules at the start of treatment.

Visiting the Home

Family is an integral part of life in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans have a strong sense of personal obligation to family.

- Several generations may live within one household.
- People rarely spend free time alone or without family instead,
 Dominican families gather in large groups to enjoy time off.
- Dominican people value hospitality and kindness, and will often welcome strangers into the family home.
- Dominicans believe in sharing what they have with those in need; they are generous hosts.
- If you are offered something you don't want, decline by saying a simple 'No, gracias'.
- Mothers are considered to be the family's most important source of emotional support.

Medication

- A range of medications, including antibiotics, can be purchased in the Dominican Republic without a prescription.
- Ill people may try self-treating prior to engaging medical care, so drug resistance should be considered.

TRADITIONAL IDEAS AND BELIEFS

Beliefs about the cause of illness

The following describes beliefs related to illness in general within the Dominican Republic.

Although some severe illnesses are not thought to have a spiritual cause, illness is sometimes thought to be related to spirits. Minor illnesses (like colds) are not considered to be caused by spirits.

- Illness caused by a bad spirit sent by an enemy is called envoi.
- A baca, another spirit believed to cause illness, is a spirit that serves its owner to protect property. It can also be sent to another person to make that person sick.
- The 'evil eye' (mal de ojo) is believed to cause illness in babies or small children.
- Disease is also believed to be caused by 'dirty blood', or by a rapid change in temperature (from hot to cold).

Some people may believe that illness may be caused by a lack of attention to *misterioso* or luases, which are spirits that often appear in the form of saints.

Beliefs about TB Transmission

Some Dominican people, including patients, may believe that TB could be transmitted in one or more of the following ways:

- · Sharing eating utensils with an infected person;
- · Sharing clothes or toilets with an infected person.

Some people may believe that burning or discarding the clothes of a person who has died of TB will help to prevent TB transmission.

Traditional Remedies

The following describes treatments used by Dominicans to treat illnesses in general.

- While some traditional health practices and beliefs resemble Voodoo practices, traditional health practices in the Dominican Republic are different from Voodoo.
- You may offend a Dominican person if you ask them if they practice Voodoo.
- Illnesses that are not attributed to a spiritual cause are often treated with herbs
- Illnesses or diseases thought to have a spiritual cause may be treated by healers.

Dominican people may consult one or more of the following types of traditional healers:

- Espiritistas (or Brujos), people believed to have spiritual powers that cure disease and control spirits;
- Curanderos, people who solve medical problems with herbs.

Treatment may include prayer and/or specific rituals designed to 'trap' a spirit thought to cause the disease.

Resguardos may also be used to prevent illness or to support treatment, and may include one or more of the following:

- Washing the patient's body with a mixture of chemical or herbal ingredients;
- Wearing amulets containing images of saints or 'magical weapons' such as the teeth of sharks or crocodiles;
- Writing pleas and magical formulas on a sheet of paper, burning the paper, then swallowing the ashes with sugar and water.

People may also consult Western doctors as they follow a plan that includes traditional remedies.

