

Guatemala

Communication

Languages and Dialects

- Official spoken language: Spanish
- Along with Spanish, indigenous languages are spoken by nearly 30 percent of the population.
- Guatemala has more than 23 distinct indigenous languages. Understanding one of these languages does not guarantee comprehension of another.
- Printed educational materials, or other reminders written in Spanish, may be an ineffective approach to educating patients or to ensuring treatment adherence due to low Spanish literacy.

Greetings

- Handshakes are common in Guatemala. Employ a lighter grip with both men and women.
- Smile and shake hands with each person present.

Names and Titles

- Guatemalans have two surnames, one paternal and one maternal. The paternal one is first, and is the name used in conversation.
- Address a Guatemalan person with an appropriate title and last name.

Non-Verbal Signals

- Guatemalan women may pat another woman on the forearm; they may also exchange kisses on the cheeks.
- Upon meeting, two men may embrace one another; they may also exchange pats on the back.
- Avoid pointing at people; this gesture may be considered rude.
- Patients may interpret 'thumbs up' or 'okay' hand signals as obscene.

Cultural Norms

Patient and Provider Interaction

- Guatemalans may stand closely together in conversation.
- Speaking loudly may be interpreted as rude.
- Men may respond to all questions asked in mixed company.
- Women may appear to listen passively in conversation.
- Patients may deliberate for what seems to be a long time before making a decision.
- Guatemalan patients expect to be touched during physical exams; they may link touch to an accurate diagnosis.
- Families may stay with a loved one in the hospital, often sleeping on mats around the sick person's bed.

Visiting the Home

- Guatemalan clients expect healthcare professionals to be attentive and to demonstrate confidence.

Traditional Ideas and Beliefs

Beliefs about TB

Guatemalan people may attribute TB to one or more of the following:

- Poverty
- Poor hygiene
- Not exercising
- Not eating well
- Living in a farming community
- Brujería (witchcraft)
- Mal de ojo (the 'evil eye')
- Viento (wind)

Some Guatemalan patients may believe that tuberculosis could be a result of being too thin (flaco); being heavier (gordo) is viewed as a sign of good health.

Beliefs About TB Transmission

Some patients may believe that TB can be transmitted in one or more of the following ways:

- Sharing food with an infected person;
- Sharing eating utensils with an infected person.

Stigma and TB

- Tuberculosis is highly stigmatized in Guatemala; many patients are fearful at the time of diagnosis.
- Healthcare practitioners outside of the traditional medical system may avoid telling patients that their symptoms are consistent with TB.
- Since some Guatemalans perceive that only poor, skinny, malnourished people have TB, they may not easily recognize their own symptoms as consistent with TB.

Common Terms for TB

Some Guatemalan patients may refer to tuberculoso ('tuberculosis') in one or more of the following ways:

- Tísico ('tuberculosis')
- Tos ('cough')
- Beh-Kah or 'BK' ('sputum samples')

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Treatment Considerations

Traditional Beliefs

Health and Illness

- Health is considered by some to be a gift from God; illness may be viewed as a punishment from God.
- Some Guatemalans think of diseases in two categories: those perceived to be 'caught' when a person gets wet, and those that are not 'caught' by getting wet.
- Patients may regard medication received by injection as more effective than medication taken by mouth.

Preventative Care

- Promotores de salud (health promoters) are popular throughout Guatemala. Promotores are trained in first aid and in preventive medicine.
- Because programs that include preventative care exist in their home country, Guatemalans are likely to be open to preventative measures.

Traditional Remedies

- Guatemalan people may first try home remedies and other traditional curative practices before seeking treatment from the medical establishment.
- Guatemalans may treat a cough with herbs or teas.
- Herbs may be consumed, or they may be used in medicinal steam baths.
- Popular herbs include manzanilla (or chamomile), mint, and hierba buena, which is a mixture of herbs from Mexico.
- Nervo forza is a popular liquid vitamin taken to promote emotional well-being along with physical health.

Traditional Healers

Some Guatemalans elicit the help of the following people for help with fever, coughs, and weight loss:

- Curanderos, also known as 'traditional curers' or herbalists, use teas and herbs to heal the sick. Curanderos may also be consulted for stress, depression, or broken bones;
- Injectors give medical advice and dispense medications by injection;
- Comadronas are midwives who may or may not have formal training.

Because of a perceived stigma attached to seeing traditional healers, patients may not report appointments with these practitioners to health care providers who work in clinics or hospitals.