

HEALTH-CARE PRACTICES

- The family is considered the most credible source of health-care information among Mexicans. This practice can impede health-seeking behaviors. For many, good health means being free of pain and is largely due to the "will of God."
- Many migrant workers are not aware of the necessity of protecting themselves from pesticides and herbicide poisoning because they are not used in Mexico. **Health teaching in this area should be a family affair.**
- Almost all Mexicans use herbal medicines and teas. The specific herbs and teas vary among families. Most of these teas and herbs are beneficial or at least not harmful. A few can be harmful by themselves, whereas others may be harmful when included with prescription and over-the-counter medications. **Ascertain if clients are using over-the-counter medicines and explain the hazards of excessive use of over-the-counter medications as well as using medicines that were originally intended for use by another family member. Assess for use of**

herbs and teas. Two herbs commonly used by Mexican Americans are *azarcon* and *greta*, which are used for colic and stomach conditions in children. Both of these herbs contain lead and can be toxic, especially in children.

- Many Mexicans practice the hot and cold theory, according to which many diseases and illnesses are caused by a disruption in the hot and cold balance of the body. Thus, if too many cold forces in the body cause an illness, treatment is aimed at balancing the condition by introducing hot treatments and foods that are considered hot. *Hot and cold do not always coincide with temperature.*
- Hot conditions include infection, diarrhea, and sore throats and, therefore, are treated with such cold foods as fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. Cold conditions, such as cancer, malaria, and earaches, are treated with such hot foods as liquor, beef, port, and spicy foods. Tremendous variations exist between and among hot and cold conditions, depending on the family.
- **The entire family must be included in health promotion and health teaching to increase compliance with health prescriptions and interaction.**
- Frequently seen cultural illness or conditions are shown in Box 24-2.
- Perform an individual pain assessment; determine usual treatment modalities used for pain; ask what the patient thinks caused the pain; and determine what the patient usually does to relieve pain. Have pain scales in Spanish as well as visual scales for those who do not read Spanish. **Explaining that pain medication will promote healing may encourage the patient to accept pain medication.**
- The sick role is easy to enter without personal feelings of inadequacy or blame. Family members readily take on the sick person's responsibilities. Family members usually care for the ill family member at home, if at all possible. **Query the family to determine if they have the resources to care for a member at home. Not all Mexicans in the United States have the extended family to care for relatives at home. Because long-term care facilities are either nonexistent or are of very poor quality in Mexico, family members may be very reluctant to place family members in such a facility. Suggesting a visit to one may be an option.**

- Extraordinary means being used to preserve life are frequently frowned upon and are often determined by finances, education, and availability of services.
- Blood transfusions are acceptable, but some may be reluctant to accept transfusion or blood products for fear of HIV (*SIDA*). The belief that the body must be buried whole deters organ donation. Organ transplantation may not be acceptable because of the belief that *mal aire*, bad air, will enter the body and increase one's risk for developing cancer. **Dispel myths related to organ donation and organ transplantation. Eliciting the assistance of a priest may be helpful.**

HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONERS

- Many Mexicans use a number of folk practitioners who are usually well known to the client. See Box 24-3.



BOX 24-3 • Major Mexican Folk Practitioners

- **Curanderos** receive their gift from God or serve an apprenticeship. Some even prescribe over-the-counter medications. They usually treat traditional illnesses not caused by witchcraft.
- **Espiritistas** (spiritualists) treat conditions caused by witchcraft. Amulets and prayer are a large part of the treatment. Seeing an *espiritista* may carry a stigma among some Hispanics.
- **Yerberos** or **Jerberos** use herbs, teas, and roots to prevent or treat illnesses. Patients usually purchase the herbs from a *botanica*, a specialist herb shop that also sells religious figurines.
- **Sobadores** treat muscle and joint problems using massage and manipulation; usually they do not have formal training.
- **Ask patients if they are using folk practitioners and the reasons why they are using them, and have them fully disclose all treatments prescribed.**



BOX 24-2 • Common Cultural Illnesses Among Mexicans

- **Empacho** (blocked intestines) may result from an incorrect balance of hot and cold foods causing a lump of food to stick in the gastrointestinal tract. Treatment includes massaging the stomach and back to dislodge the food bolus.
- **Mal de ojo** (evil eye) occurs when an older person looks at a younger person in an admiring fashion. Such eye contact can be voluntary or involuntary. Symptoms are numerous, including fever, anorexia and vomiting, or irritability. The spell can be broken if the person doing the admiring touches the person while admiring him or her. **Allopathic health-care providers are usually unable to cure mal de ojo. Making a referral to a folk practitioner is advisable.**
- **Caida de mollera** (fallen fontanel) has numerous causes, which may include removing a nursing infant too harshly from the nipple or handling an infant too roughly. Symptoms vary from failure to thrive to irritability. The usual treatment is to hold the infant upside down by the feet. **Assess for dehydration. A referral to a folk practitioner is also recommended.**
- **Susto** (magical fright or soul loss) is associated with epilepsy, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases as well as an "overwhelming feelings of loss." Symptoms may be physical or psychological in nature and may also be consistent with depression. **Gear treatment to the underlying causes, and treat physical and psychological symptoms.**

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GUIDE TO CULTURALLY COMPETENT
HEALTH CARE, BY LARRY PURNELL
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