

How Latinos approach healthcare issues

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The Latino presence in the United States is strengthening on a daily basis and contrary to other immigrant groups, Latinos are not assimilating in the same manner. For example, most European immigrants that came to the United States in the early 1900's have basically become fully assimilated with the Anglo/American culture. Latinos on the other hand, seem to continue being Latinos well into their third and fourth generation. In contrast to the European immigrants, Latinos continue to base their identity by strengthening their ties when it comes to family, culture, religion and especially language. Most third and fourth generation Latinos still speak Spanish and that fact is well proven by the immense growth seen over the years in several Spanish media venues (especially TV and Radio). In addition, over the past years, we have seen a tremendous increase in advertising budgets that are now being strictly allocated to reach the "profitable" Hispanic target audience. Latinos tend to be very loyal to brand names and products that advertise on Spanish television / radio and despite their low-income levels, they tend to spend more (on things like over-the-counter medications) than many other minority groups. Most Latinos do not turn their backs on their country of origin or basic cultural beliefs and usually embrace that cultural background which ultimately affects the distinctive way they approach many things, including healthcare.

Although Anglos and Latinos seem to share the same major health concerns, including cancer, AIDS, diabetes and heart disease, Latinos approach healthcare issues in a different way. Hispanics, in general, differ from Anglos in that they rely more on home remedies and over-the-counter medications as well as strongly relying on advice from friends and family members for their opinion on medical related matters. Latinos also tend to self-diagnose and self-treat initial symptoms (using home remedies / over-the-counter medication) and will only seek professional advice if symptoms persisted. Another difference between Anglo and Hispanic patients is that the latter seems to be somewhat less compliant when it comes to routine check-ups and following instructions. Hispanics are often described by doctors as "more emotional" and tend to self-medicate and self-prescribe more often than the average Anglo patient.

Family is considered to be the very soul of the Latino culture and consequently plays a very important role when making healthcare decisions. Family recommendations are said to be of utmost importance when selecting a doctor and / or hospital or when making any type of medical related decisions.

Within the Latino family, we must mention the important role that Hispanic women play as the main source of strength that continuously holds the family nucleus together. These women are innate nurturers and often put aside their own health concerns and problems in order to assist other family members in need. Stereotypically perceived as playing a somewhat submissive role, surprisingly, Hispanic women are usually in charge when it relates to medical care concerns. In this specific case, the usual male authority figure allows their female counterpart to take charge and make most of the medical related decisions.

Another important distinction between Hispanics and Anglos is their approach and perception of emotional and /or psychological issues. Hispanics in general are extremely reluctant to admit overall feelings of depression since depression is usually associated with feelings of being out of control, weakness and / or failure. In addition, Hispanics tend to find it easier and more socially acceptable to admit being anxious than to being depressed. When dealing with anxiety and depression, doctors often describe their Hispanic patients as less likely to admit to being depressed because of the cultural and negative stigma involved. However, anxiety is more readily discussed and admitted to others.

Language barrier situations also play an important role when it comes to Latinos and healthcare issues. Most Latinos would prefer to visit a doctor and / or hospital with a diverse bilingual staff. In addition to the language preference, Latinos often feel that they are “treated better” by another Latino. Added to cultural sensitivity issues, having a diverse staff makes minorities in general feel “more at ease” and less likely to feel uncomfortable, threatened and / or discriminated against.

In conclusion, to value those who are different we have to get to know them better. Healthcare and other industries wanting to penetrate the Hispanic market should become more involved with the Latino community in order to “win their trust” and avoid any cultural sensitivity issues. This “trust” will ultimately prove to be very profitable, since Latinos loved to be catered to and would welcome the attention. In addition, the implementation of in-language advertising campaigns and /or marketing strategies that positively target Latinos would ultimately position these companies as undoubtedly caring about the Hispanic community and consequently win over the coveted Hispanic consumer.