



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients' and coworkers' views, traditions, and actions. While you can use this information as a guide, keep in mind that all people within a culture are **not** the same. Be sure to ask your patients and their families about specific beliefs, practices, and customs that may be relevant and important during medical treatment and hospitalization.

When describing the Greek culture, the following information could apply to Greeks visiting from Greece, first generation Greek Americans, or ensuing generation Greek Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all Greeks.



## general information

- ✓ You should formally address patients and family members, especially adults (e.g. Mr./Mrs.), and keep your dialogue serious rather than casual.
- ✓ While Greek Americans understand American humor, Greek patients from Greece may respond better to a pleasant demeanor than to jokes.
- ✓ Family is an important part of the Greek culture. Patients may wish to have a family member present 24 hours a day.
- ✓ The majority of Greek Americans are Greek Orthodox. The word "Greek" in Greek Orthodox refers to the Greek-speaking Christians who formed the original Christian church.
- ✓ Greek patients may bring religious icons in for their room or bedside. You should leave icons where they are placed.

## *inter-personal relationships*

### **relationship roles**

- ✓ Traditionally, the Greek culture is male-dominated, particularly in the older population.
- ✓ Older male patients may be uncomfortable around female doctors and nurses.

### **decision-making**

- ✓ It is important to involve a Greek family in treatment decisions.
- ✓ Family members consult with each other, making decisions and approaching the doctor as a group. If there is a disagreement, they may look to the family member with the most knowledge to make the decision.

### **conflict resolution**

- ✓ In general, Greeks are assertive.
- ✓ Religion generally does not play a role in resolving conflict about health matters. Generally, Greeks listen to the physician.
- ✓ Generally, in situations where there is disagreement, Greeks may not want to change their opinions. It may be necessary to involve an impartial third person to resolve a conflict. However, to help prevent any ongoing bitterness, a sincere apology may ease any tension.

### **personal space**

- ✓ Lines in Greece are not orderly. Greek patients from Greece may not find it unusual to have shoving or pushing in line.
- ✓ Until Greek Americans become familiar with you, they may keep a distance.
- ✓ Greek patients from Greece or first generation Greek Americans may have close personal space zones with people whom they know well. In cases in which they want the doctor to share their sense of family, they may step close to the physician or touch the physician, such as holding onto an arm. In these instances, you should not move out of the personal space zone or pull away from the touch (such actions might be interpreted as rude.)

### **gestures**

- ✓ To signal that everything is fine, it is okay to use the “thumbs up” sign. However, you should not use the “okay” sign (it may be interpreted as obscene).
- ✓ To signal “yes,” Greeks may tilt their heads to either side.
- ✓ To signal “no,” Greeks may nod their heads upward or lift their eyebrows upward.
- ✓ If you compliment Greek patients from Greece and they do not believe your words are sincere, they may make a puffing noise through pursed lips to ward off the evil eye.

## *treatment issues*

### **medical treatment**

- ✓ Because the doctor is seen as an authority figure, he/she should be the one to give any bad news. It should be delivered to the family first or to the patient when the family is present.
- ✓ Older patients are more likely to be afraid of doctors and hospitals. They may deny being ill. In these situations, it may be beneficial to speak with a family member whom the patient trusts, so he/she can talk to the patient.
- ✓ Greek patients may be superstitious about why they are ill.
- ✓ Greeks are uncomfortable with the unknown. They want information shared with them.
- ✓ The Greek patient likes to be attended to and pampered.

### **responses to pain**

- ✓ Older patients may be afraid of addiction to pain medication. If you're administering pain medication, you should emphasize the reasons for taking it.

### **emotions**

- ✓ In general, Greek men and women openly express all emotions. They may not view holding back as normal behavior.
- ✓ Greeks tend to be congenial, but may be very somber about sickness and death.
- ✓ Patients may respond to a human touch, a personalized approach, and a caring attitude.

### **food**

- ✓ The Greek Orthodox religion requires members to abstain from protein (such as meat and fish) and dairy products on Wednesdays, Fridays, during Lent (the 40 days prior to Easter), and during the 40 days prior to Christmas. Contemporary Greek Americans are not as strict in this observance, except during Lent and when preparing for communion. Exceptions are made for hospital patients, but you should make sure you know whether your patient intends to fast, particularly if your patient needs a high protein diet.
- ✓ Other than fasting, there are generally no restrictions or prohibitions regarding food.
- ✓ Greeks may prefer olive oil to butter, may request a lot of vegetables, and may want fresh fruit instead of a dessert.
- ✓ Many Greeks, particularly older Greeks, do not want ice.

### **death**




- ✓ Patients may want to receive communion before death. You should ask the patient's family for direction if death is imminent.
- ✓ If the patient wants a priest, a Greek Orthodox priest should be contacted.
- ✓ Many people, both family and friends, may wish to be present as a patient is dying. Ritual crying is common.
- ✓ There are no special customs regarding amputation, cremations, or transplants. However, the Greek Orthodox Church does not approve of cremation. When a person dies, the Greek Orthodox Church believes that the soul (the spirit) and the body (the physical) separate, with the spirit going to God and the body returning to the earth.

**g l o s s a r y**

word	meaning
Andió	Good-bye
Ekogenia	Family
Efharistó	Thank you
Fagitó	Food
Hérete	Hello
Kalá	Fine
Mamá, Mitéra	Mother
Nái	Yes
Neró	Water
Óhi	No
Parakaló	You are welcome; please
Patéra, Babá	Father
Ponás	Does it hurt?
Poù	Where?
Poulé	A lot?
Seghóme	Excuse me
Tea Kámiece	How are you?
Thélo	I want...
Yásou	Hi, you; hello: good-bye (general)

*did you know*



-  There are approximately 60,000 Greek Americans in the city of Chicago and up to 125,000 in the metropolitan area, according to the 1996-community estimate.
-  Approximately 30% are first generation Greek American, according to the 1990 Census.
-  Most Greek Americans speak English as their first language. However, a majority of Greek Americans (including those who are second- and third-generation) can speak or understand Greek.

## important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
Name Days	Varies	Greek Christians are named after saints. Each saint has a day (or series of days) each year when he/she is celebrated. Greeks (primarily men) who share a saint's name often celebrate their saint's religious holiday with a social gathering.
New Year's	January 1	Marks the first day of the new year. In Greece, gifts are exchanged on New Year's Day (St. Basil's Day) instead of on Christmas. For the children of Greece, Santa Claus is St. Basil.
Epiphany	January 8	Marks the baptism of Jesus Christ.
Greek Orthodox Easter	Date varies, usually in April; always falls after Jewish Passover and generally after other Christian religions' Easter.	Marks the resurrection of Jesus Christ
Greek Independence Day	March 25	Celebrates Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

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