



PRIDE IN OUR DIVERSITY

The following information is provided to help you become more aware of your patients and co-workers 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 Polish culture, the following information could apply to Poles visiting from Poland, first generation Polish-Americans, or ensuing generations of Polish-Americans. Each piece of information does not necessarily apply to all people from Poland.



## general information

- ✓ You should formally address patients and family members, especially adults (i.e., Mr./Mrs.) and keep the dialogue serious and direct.
- ✓ Family is an important part of Polish culture. Patients might want to have their families present 24 hours a day.
- ✓ By far, the great majority of Poles are Roman Catholic.
- ✓ Many Poles, especially older patients, may bring in objects of religious meaning, such as sacred pictures, rosaries or a prayer book. Such objects should be left where they are, unless specifically requested by the patient.

## *inter-personal relationships*

### **relationship roles**

- ✓ Traditionally, the Polish culture is male dominated, especially among the older population.
- ✓ Some male patients may be uncomfortable around female doctors and nurses.

### **decision-making**

- ✓ It is important to involve the whole Polish family in all aspects of any major decision regarding the patient's health.
- ✓ Family members, although usually adults, consult among themselves the actions and their consequences before reaching any decision.

### **conflict resolution**

- ✓ In general Poles are not overly assertive and demonstrative.
- ✓ Religion does not usually play a role in determining what is best for the patient.
- ✓ As with many other cultures, if there is disagreement, it may be necessary to bring in an unbiased third party, or back up your information with a publication. To prevent any ongoing bitterness, a sincere apology may ease any tension.

### **personal space**

- ✓ Many Poles are used to long waiting lines, and find it disrespectful to shove, push or cut into one.
- ✓ Before getting to know you, many Poles may want to keep a distance.
- ✓ Personal interaction, even among those familiar with each other, does not involve much body contact, except a handshake. In Poland most communication is verbal, and only recently have embraces become part of a greeting routine among the close friends and family members.

### **gestures**

- ✓ Polish people are not overly demonstrative - avoid body contact unless you are among close friends or family.
- ✓ Poles do not speak in loud voices and are generally calm, unless provoked.
- ✓ A general nod is considered to signal "yes."
- ✓ Avoid chewing gum, especially when talking, as this is considered impolite.

*t r e a t m e n t   i s s u e s*

**medical treatment**

- ✓ The doctor is seen as an authority figure; therefore he/she should give the family any bad news.
- ✓ Any bad news should be delivered to a patient first, who can then relay it to his family. Parents should be the first ones to be notified in case of a child.
- ✓ Some older patients are likely to be afraid of doctors and hospitals. They may deny being ill, or needing treatment. In these situations, it may be necessary to contact a close relative of the patient, or someone he/she trusts in order to calm them down.
- ✓ Polish patients want to know the truth about their condition, no matter of the prognosis.
- ✓ Polish patients do not enjoy too much attention, but want to be served in a timely and courteous fashion.
- ✓ Older patients may be afraid of an addiction to pain medication. Most also dislike needles, and would much prefer an alternate means of treatment.

**emotions**

- ✓ Poles, especially men, do not openly express their emotions. Most view crying as a sign of weakness.
- ✓ Poles tend to have a happy and congenial attitude, although may be somber about sickness or death.
- ✓ Patients respond to a courteous, personalized and caring attitude.

**food**




- ✓ Many Roman Catholic Poles abstain from meat on Fridays throughout Lent (the 40 day period before Easter). Some abstain from meat on Fridays throughout the year.
- ✓ Many Poles do not like ice with their beverages. Please ask.

**death**

- ✓ Most Polish patients would want to receive communion before death. You should ask the patient's family for direction if death is imminent.
- ✓ Usually, a patient also inquires about a priest. In this case a Roman Catholic priest should be contacted.
- ✓ Most patients would like to have their families present as the patient is dying. Usually death is followed by a long period of somber silence, and the family should not be disturbed.
- ✓ There are no special customs regarding amputation, cremations, or transplants. Most Roman Catholic Poles, especially older patients, disapprove of cremation because of a religious sentiment.

did you know



-  Poles are the largest immigrant group in Chicago, taken into consideration first and second generation Poles.
-  The name Poland comes from a tribe *Polanie*, who settled the land between the rivers Oder and Vistula around 9th century A.D.
-  Although the first language of many first generation Polish-Americans is Polish, and many first and second generation Polish-American children attend Polish school classes on Saturday to learn about their language and heritage.

g l o s s a r y word	meaning
Do widzenia	Good-bye
Rodzina	Family
Dziękuję	Thank you
Jedzenie	Food
Dzień dobry	Hello
W porządku	Fine
Mama, matka	Mother
Tak	Yes
Nie	No
Woda	Water
Proszę	You're welcome
Tata, Ojciec	Father
Boli	Does it hurt?
Gdzie	Where?
Bardzo	A lot?
Przepraszam	Excuse me <i>and</i> I'm sorry
Chce..	I want
Czesc	Hi

## important holidays & dates

Event	Date	Description
New Year	January 1	Marks the first day of the New Year.
Constitution Day	May 3	Celebrates a ratification of the Polish Constitution, the second after the US. Celebrated by parades, it replaced May 1, Labor Day, which was associated with communism.
Easter	Varies '99 April 4 '00 April 23 '01 April 15	Celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
All Saint's Day	November 1	Catholic feast to celebrate the saints and martyrs of the church. Marked with visitations to the cemeteries and the graves of family and friends.
Polish Independence Day	November 11	Marks the regaining of Independence following World War I.
Christmas	December 25	Marks the birth of Jesus Christ.

### Sources

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