

NEWS CAPSULE

Como se dice *Doctor, I hurt here en espanol?*

By Polly Geller - with Clodomiro Falcon

According to the US Census Bureau, Hispanics are the fastest growing group in the country. Their purchasing power of nearly \$700 billion in 2005 is projected to reach \$1.2 trillion in 2010.

As a population group, they are very interested in obtaining healthcare information.

New immigrants often seek to merge into the so-called



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Melting Pot. Hispanic Americans, have very different assimilation patterns. They retain their Hispanic sense of identity for several generations. A significant aspect of this Hispanic/Latino identity is the continued use of Spanish language, even when English is spoken in business, school and in the community.

For those of us who studied Spanish in high school or college, it's a good beginning, but only just a beginning. Physician/patient relationships with the Hispanic community require going beyond speaking Spanish. There are many language and cultural variations throughout Central and South America, making it very important to reach beyond a *literal translation*.

If your Hispanic patient speaks and understands English, you might wonder what's wrong with using English? Language is only one aspect of your patient's culture. With Hispanic patients, you are likely going to be interfacing with the family ... and the family may not understand or speak English comfortably. Hispanic patients and their families tend to prefer practices and hospitals with a bilingual staff. It is a matter of sensitivity, trust and confidence, as well as the absence or perceived absence of discrimination. The frequent perception among Hispanic patients and their families is that they are treated better by another Hispanic. *Hispanic patients*, says Dr. Fredy Duque, Integrated Medical Centers, *trust Hispanic medical professionals and Spanish-speaking staff to guide and advise them, explain their rights, and direct them to appropriate resources.*

Family is the bedrock of Latino society, hand-in-hand with Religion, Heritage, Culture and Language. Hispanic women play a major role in healthcare decision-making, including selection of physician, hospital and treatment decisions. The father/husband will have major input in other decisions, but this is not his venue. The Hispanic Family will also turn to friends for advice and the local community becomes an extended family.

Physicians and other healthcare professionals should recognize that their Hispanic patients and families have a different approach to healthcare, including receiving and accepting information, treatment and medications. Latinos check with family and friends, self-diagnose, frequently self-diagnose and initially may use over-the-counter medicines or home remedies. If symptoms persist, they will call the physician. When there are psychological issues or problems, Hispanics tend to be more comfortable with the concept of *anxiety*. However, depression, emotional, mental problems imply weakness, failure, lack of control. Relating to Hispanic patients and their families means being a resource, communicating prevention as well as treatment and cure, and conveying confidence.

It cannot be emphasized enough the ways in which Spanish language continues to play an essential role in Latino families' daily life. Hispanics listen extensively to Spanish TV and Radio, which is very popular, and read Spanish language newspapers. According to *Arbitron* an international media and marketing research organization, Spanish-language radio attracts 19 percent of all radio listeners age 25 to 34. This is very relevant to your practice's Hispanic marketing outreach efforts. For example: a large Connecticut medical practice situated in a heavily Hispanic area was doing all of its marketing in English, including website, letters and advertising. After recognizing their area's demographics, we helped them implement a bi-lingual marketing effort

The Web is increasingly important; Many Hispanics will go to your website first. If you are serving this market, consider pages in Spanish language. Also consider having a News Room in Spanish. And comments from a well-known person will generate a lot of interest, notes PR Newswire's *Communicating to the Hispanic Market* – equally relevant for web content and marketing materials.

Both relationships and language are essential to develop trust and gain loyalty. Some of the simple things your medical practice can do to achieve this are ensuring bi-lingual staff capabilities, providing Spanish language health literature and marketing materials and establishing relationships with community Hispanic organizations. *La gente dicen que el espanol es el idioma del futuro*, says Dr. Gary Midelton, Internal Medicine, *Que es el de hoy.*

Geller, Grace and its President, Polly Geller, received the Business Marketing Association's Star Award for Excellence in Marketing Communications. Clodomiro Falcon is President and CEO of *La Guia*, the Hispanic Commercial Guide. The authors would be pleased to speak with healthcare providers, professional and business services on Communicating with the Hispanic market.

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