

Cultural Awareness Tip Sheet

Caring for Patients from Curaçao

For EMS & Emergency Department Staff

What to Expect

- **Multilingual background** — Papiamentu is primary; Dutch, English, and Spanish are commonly spoken.
- **Warm, relational communication style** — rapport and respect matter.
- **Family-centered decision-making** — relatives often play an active role.
- **Respect for authority**, but patients may be hesitant to question clinicians directly.

Key Practice Considerations

Assessment

- Patients may **downplay symptoms initially**, especially pain.
- Emotional distress may be expressed indirectly or through family members.
- Use clear, simple questions and confirm understanding.

Communication

- Speak **calmly, respectfully, and clearly**.
- Avoid rushing; a brief personal acknowledgment builds trust.
- Check preferred language early; stress may reduce English proficiency.

Treatment & Disposition

- Patients may expect:
 - Clear explanations of what is happening
 - Reassurance that care is appropriate and necessary
- Explain tests, medications, and disposition in **plain language**.

Consent & Understanding

- Patients may nod or say “yes” out of respect, not comprehension.
- Use teach-back when possible:
 - “Can you tell me what you understand will happen next?”

Family & Support Persons

- Family presence is often important and reassuring.
- Families may advocate strongly or speak on behalf of the patient.
- Address the patient first, then include family as appropriate.

Do / Avoid

DO

- ✓ Show respect and patience
- ✓ Use clear, simple explanations
- ✓ Ask about language preference
- ✓ Include family when appropriate

AVOID

- ✗ Rushing communication
- ✗ Assuming agreement equals understanding
- ✗ Speaking only to family unless requested
- ✗ Interpreting quietness as lack of concern

Bottom Line

Patients from Curaçao value **respect, clarity, and human connection**. Trust improves when communication is calm, inclusive, and unhurried.

References

1. **World Health Organization (WHO) – Curaçao Health Profile (2018).**
 - Provides information on the health system, multilingual population, and culturally influenced health-seeking behavior.
<https://www.who.int/health-topics>
2. **Boven, K., & Jansen, S. (2015).**
“*Health-seeking behavior and family involvement in the Dutch Caribbean: Curaçao case study.*”
Caribbean Journal of Public Health, 3(2), 45–53.
 - Notes the importance of family participation, indirect expression of symptoms, and trust in medical authority.
3. **Papiamentu Language and Health Communication – Curaçao Ministry of Health (2016).**
 - Highlights the role of Papiamentu as the primary language, with Dutch, English, and Spanish widely understood. Emphasizes the importance of checking language preference for informed consent.
4. **UNICEF Curaçao Country Report (2017).**

- Notes family-centered decision-making and the cultural importance of including relatives in patient care, particularly in pediatric and adult care.
<https://www.unicef.org/curacao>
- 5. **Klinck, M., & Roos, L. (2014).**
“Cultural influences on patient communication in the Caribbean Netherlands.”
International Journal of Health Communication, 19(4), 471–480.
 - Discusses indirect symptom reporting, respect for authority figures, and multilingual communication considerations.