

## Cultural Reference Guide

# Greek

This is intended as a staff reference for use as a starting point for understanding care for those of different cultures. Always talk with your patient and their family to learn about his/her particular beliefs and practices to avoid stereotyping. There can be large variations in beliefs and practices even within a given family. Be respectful of the uniqueness of each person you care for at OSUWMC. See “Resources & References” for sources for this information.

**Language:** Demotic Greek, dialects vary by region, written Greek is the same across regions.

### **Spiritual/Religious Practices**

- Most are Greek Orthodox but some affiliated with Jehovah’s Witnesses, Judaism or Evangelical Christianity.
- May wear cross or pendant of Virgin Mary that should not be removed without permission.

### **Communication**

- Very formal greetings. Shake hands with new acquaintances. Highly respectful of elders.
- Tend to be loud and use hand gestures and talk over one another.
- Approach eldest male to find out who is family spokesperson. Often best to explain tests and procedures with family in room.

### **Food Practices**

- Lots of rice, fish, boiled greens, lamb, bread, olives and feta cheese. Evening meal often eaten after 8:30 PM.
- Healing foods include macaroni and cheese with meat (pastitsio), rice pudding, baked custards, cream pie and yogurt. Lactose intolerance common.

### **Family**

- Patriarchal and multiple generations may live together or close to each other.
- Eldest male or oldest adult makes decisions related to family.
- May prefer to have family members at bedside at all times to enhance recovery.
- Cherish young children and expect adults to care for elders.

### **Health Beliefs**

- Mental health issues are considered shameful and those who seek help usually start with spiritual counseling.
- Expect sick person to rely on family for care and support when sick.
- Massage rubbing alcohol on ailing body parts and common to use cupping to draw out fever, colds, backache or high blood pressure. Also use various herbal remedies.
- May not question doctor for fear of challenging authority and do not want to appear uneducated or uninformed.
- Some object to heart transplants due to belief that heart is the seat of the soul.

### **Death/Dying**

- Immediate family and priest present at death, and prefer to die at home in care of family.
- Do not believe in cremation. Organ donation acceptable to preserve life but not for research purposes. Autopsy usually unacceptable unless medically needed since it desecrates the body.