

SYMPOSIUM ON IMMIGRATION AND ALTERNATIVE HEALING SYSTEMS

Organized by the Immigration and Health Initiative (IAHI)

**Urban Public Health Program, The School of the Health Sciences, The Schools of the Health Professions
Hunter College of the City University of New York**

Dr. Ina Vanderbroek Presenter

Ina Vandebroek obtained a degree in biology and holds a PhD in Medical Sciences from Ghent University, Belgium. She conducted two years of postdoctoral ethnobotany research in Bolivia, studying the healing beliefs and practices and the medicinal plant knowledge of two groups of healers from the Andes and Amazon, respectively. Since February 2005, she works at the Institute of Economic Botany of the New York Botanical Garden as a postdoctoral research associate on an NIH-funded project that aims at investigating the medicinal plants that are known and used for common health conditions by Dominicans in New York City and in the Dominican Republic.

Objectives of the Presentation

- Demonstrate the importance of food plants as medicines in Dominican alternative healing systems
- Compare medicinal plant knowledge of Dominican immigrants in New York City coming from rural versus urban areas in the Dominican Republic
- Highlight the gendered nature of medicinal plant knowledge and the correlation between knowledge and other individual variables, such as age

Abstract: Knowledge and Use of Medicinal Plants by Dominicans in New York City

This presentation will focus on an intermediate analysis of quantitative data from 125 semi-structured interviews with Dominican immigrants in New York City who use and/or know medicinal plants for selected common health conditions. Participants were recruited at the AIM clinic-New York Presbyterian Hospital, Alianza Dominicana (a Dominican NGO) in Washington Heights, and through snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria were: be Dominican (male or female), older than 18, and report to have some knowledge about medicinal plants. Prior to interviewing, oral consent was obtained from participants. The questionnaire covered different aspects, including (1) the history and modalities of medicinal plant use; (2) the general use preference for medicinal plants or pharmaceuticals; (3) socio-demographic variables; (4) acculturation; (5) medicinal plant knowledge for 30 selected health conditions; (6) the transmission of plant knowledge. The results show that: (1) food plants are an important component of the Dominican healing pharmacopoeia and account on average for 60 % of the total number of medicinal plants cited; (2) Dominican immigrants who grew up in rural areas in the Dominican Republic mention significantly more medicinal plants than people coming from urban areas; (3) women cite significantly more “medicinal foods” than men; and (4) age is positively correlated with medicinal plant knowledge.