Abstract
Plants and traditional medical use are used exclusively or in addition to conventional health care in immigrant communities. Immigrants may opt for traditional healers and plants for several reasons including familiarity, legal issues relating to immigration status, and lack and/or cost of health insurance. The botánica, a healing and religious shop, is a part of the traditional medicine practice but not well studied. A systematic survey of shops advertised as botánicas was conducted across several neighborhoods in The Bronx. 12 botánicas were selected and surveyed through convenience and purposive sampling while scouting botánica locations to identify active shops. The botánicas surveyed had a mainly Latino background but service a mixed clientele, including different Latino groups and non-Latino groups. Only four of the most commonly mentioned plants ( Hierba buena, albahaca, menta, romero), which were common herbs, were easily accessible both fresh and dry in NYC grocery markets. The plants sold in botánicas are acquired in New York, from other states, and from different countries. Lastly, the most common conditions of well-being that clients seek help with at the botánica were primarily spiritual related (i.e. negative energy), followed by physical (e.g. diabetes) and mental (e.g. depression). Of the health conditions reported by the 2010 Community Health Survey, only depression and diabetes overlap with the conditions mentioned at the botánica. Understanding how botánicas function as a health care option and who they service can better lead patient provider communication and a more holistic approach to health care.

Introduction
Many immigrants settling in urban areas will retain their cultural patterns, values, and beliefs, including traditional or folk medicine practices. Urban immigrants who have emigrated from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are often restricted in their ability to access the conventional medical systems typical of their home countries. Lastly, the most common conditions of well-being that clients seek help with at the botánica were primarily spiritual related (i.e. negative energy), followed by physical (e.g. diabetes) and mental (e.g. depression). Of the health conditions reported by the 2010 Community Health Survey, only depression and diabetes overlap with the conditions mentioned at the botánica. Understanding how botánicas function as a health care option and who they service can better lead patient provider communication and a more holistic approach to health care.

Methods
Institutional Review Board protocol submission (IRB-AAAK4551; approved February 22, 2012). Consent forms and a questionnaire were created in English and then translated into Spanish. In New York City.

Plant Common Name | Spanish | Scientific name (Family) | # of times mentioned | # of plants available
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Ruda | Ruta | Ruta chalepensis (Rutaceae) | 8 | 8
Hierba buena | Hierba buena | Mentha pulegium (Lamiaceae) | 7 | 7
Albahaca | Albahaca | Ocimum basilicum L. (Oleaceae) | 6 | 6
Menta | Menta | Mentha piperita (Lamiaceae) | 5 | 5
Dulce de membrillo | Membrillo | Pyrus communis L. (Rosaceae) | 4 | 4
Hierba buena | Hierba buena | Mentha pulegium (Lamiaceae) | 4 | 4
Menta | Menta | Mentha piperita (Lamiaceae) | 4 | 4

Discussion
While the popularity and ethnicity of botánicas was varied, the owners’ and staff’s backgrounds varied less so (mostly Dominican), which was not completely unexpected due to the small number of interviews conducted. It would appear that spiritual issues are more common but physical complaints are still often present, which is reinforced by the fact that a plant specialist or curandero was not always present but a spiritual consultant was a constant. Still most botánicas sell plants, either fresh or dried. Most plants used purely for spiritual baths were not found in any of the markets. Those herbs common in cooking were easily found dry in the markets, but when fresh they were often sold in small plastic packages that contained a couple of sprigs. Some of the more important plants are clearly not as accessible in NYC outside of the botánicas, especially fresh plants.

Conclusion
Cultural ties, strong beliefs and faith appear to be the primary reason why people access the botánicas. Many of the clients have been raised around and are familiar with traditional medicine. The botánica is a place where they can find religious products and inaccessible plants, while receiving help and advice from community members. It is important that conventional health care providers understand this approach to health care, especially due to disparities in the health care people receive according to ethnicity and income level. An enhanced understanding of traditional medicine can lead to better patient-provider communication, as well as a more culturally sensitive and appropriate approach to health care.

References

Figure 2. Bailey’s are often composed of several plants and can be classified as either aloe vera or aloe barbadensis. This type of aloe vera plant is often called a “true” aloe vera plant. The plant is native to the Middle East and is often used for its medicinal properties.