

The value of health across cultures

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Evaluating the Value of Health and Cultural Heritage across

Cultures Culture and values are standards that influence and shape human behaviors, decision making processes, personal relationships, and status of health and happiness. The United States has become a symbol of a multicultural society representing many different ethnicities and minority groups. As our culture continues to grow rapidly so is the necessity to increase awareness, understanding, and tolerance of these diverse groups.

As health care providers we must understand the basic needs of our patients, whether they are black, white, green or purple, and the repercussions of prejudices and cultural insensitivities. Health care providers need to become responsive to the cultural values of different peoples and how these could augment effective and humanistic care delivery (Edelman, 2010). The Heritage Assessment Tools allows you to identify individual cultural beliefs and behaviors. These beliefs have shaped how we value health, the ways we maintain our health and the practice/acceptance of modern medicine.

For example, if a patient identifies those relationships with family members or members from the community are highly valued then the nurse should consider lenience with the hospital visiting policy to meet the patients needs to maintain and restore their health. Many cultures value a caring holistic approach to medicine that incorporates family and supports systems to promote healing. Some cultures do not emphasis the practices of western medicine and utilize healers like priests, herbalists, or scientologist.

By applying a heritage assessment in evaluating the needs of the patient as well as maintaining an open and understanding relationship of their culture, nurses can work to meet their needs in a holistic approach. How we have learned to take care of ourselves or our “ health maintenance “ varies from culture to culture. I grew up in a culture where regular exercise, watching what you ate, and “ being thin is in” were highly valued. I and most of my friends had retainers and braces to maintain the image of good health with a picture perfect smile.

As kids we were all active and parents provided healthy snacks as well as well balanced meals. Fast food and take-out was a once-in-a-while indulgence. For ethnic groups, health as a value may have different definitions and their behavior may reflect this (Edelman, 2010). I interviewed a Hispanic female and her family about how her culture has influenced her maintenance of day-to-day health. Family is an important dynamic in her culture, putting everyone else in her family before herself. Her family has influence of her everyday decision making, sure her children and grown parents are always well taken care of.

Diet is based on being able to provide for the family more than the value of the foods nutrients. She admits that fast food is a cheaper option for feeding her children than stocking up on healthy produce at the grocery store. Her home is shared with her husband, four children, and her two parents, so they are all involved in taking care of one another. I also had the opportunity to meet with a family that traveled from Saudi Arabia to receive cardiac evaluation and treatment at the world renowned Texas Medical Center.

The adult male patient as his wife were very private and did not express interest in developing personal relationship with their nurse, so most my assessment was made from conversations held with their daughter a practicing physician in the same hospital. She told me that health maintenance is highly valued and the government provides a number of health care services to the public. Those who can afford it will travel elsewhere for expert opinions and cutting edge treatments. In regards to their routine values of health maintenance, their family practices and beliefs are based from Islamic religion and culture.

Islam promotes health and wellness with meditation, proper diet, regular activity and cleanliness (bathing, fragrance, attention to hair and nails). Lastly, their culture strictly dictates the foods they eat as well as what is considered toxic or harmful to their health. The ways of preventing disease or "health protection" has made an impact on health care. Growing up with access to health insurance, routine doctors visits, vaccinations, and educational programs to promote health and wellness such as the D. A. R. E program was normal practice. One of the biggest obstacles for the Hispanic family was not having access to affordable health care. Health care insurance is not affordable for many poor Americans, whose priorities are the basic needs of health including food, clothing, and shelter rather than health care (Edelman, 2010). They admit to not having good preventative health care like routine physicals, medication compliance, attending follow-up appointments, and regular dental hygiene. Being hospitalized is often a last resort because of the financial stress that can be caused because of lack of health insurance. In contrast to the Hispanic American family, the Saudi family viewed out of pocket expenses a low priority when considering health protection.

This patient needed to have heart surgery and with support from immediate and extended family members in the United States, some practicing as physicians, this was the best option. Good health is often a sign of affluence and high social status. How individuals deal with disease and restore health is based from cultural beliefs and learned experiences. Learning from personal experience with my family members being hospitalized and being treated for disease, we are aggressive with treatment and expect the information and results quickly.

We expect to have everything done to treat illness and when modern medicine fails we have a hard time accepting that reality because of our faith in the health care system, doctors, and nurses. The Islamic culture also encourages individuals to seek medical help and treatment. Religion plays a huge part in healing and health restoration. I witnessed my patient and his wife praying regularly. Family is also key for this culture, demonstrating strong ties with both immediate and extended family at the bedside involved in regular discussion with physicians and other health care providers.

Being able to afford out of pocket expenses they expect the highest level of expertise and excellence in care from their health care providers. Sometimes family members will contribute to these expenses. Hispanic cultures typically cater towards men, children, and the elders in the household. This Hispanic American female admits that even immediately after having her fourth baby, she was still the primary care giver to her children and homemaker/care taker of the household.

Also, she admits that even though not having regular access to medical care this does not influence how she provides attention and nurtures her family members during times illness. Her culture has a strong emphasis on family and religion as well as practicing traditional home remedies. Being surrounded by family and prayer helps her and her family in times sickness and promotes healthy recovery. Based on the three different cultures evaluated there is one strong common value, family.

Health traditions and beliefs are greatly influenced from learned family practices as well as from influential support systems. This century will continue to be a time of great challenges as the population of the U. S. continues to be a nation of diverse peoples (Edelman, 2010). Nurses continue to make many positive moves toward understanding culturally diverse populations (Edelman, 2010). As we have learned, culture is a very unique and complex set of values. By being aware of cultural differences and gaining cultural knowledge nurses can help promote and ensure a healthy society.