

Health and the dying process in russian jewish culture

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I come from a Russian Jewish family. People in my culture deem good health as the single most important factor in life. Many Russians who have immigrated to America hold American doctors with very high esteem, and have faith in their medical advice. Yet, there are many other elderly Russian people who are doubtful of modern medicine and healthcare, and would rather use home remedies and treatments.

For many Russian Jews nutrition is the most important determinant of health, and seeing their family members consume enough food is vital. Another interesting aspect of my culture is its view on mental health, which is often disregarded and stigmatized, so people will not seek the treatment they need. Family is extremely important for most Russian Jews. Elders oftentimes help raise their grandchildren, who in return care for their grandparents in old age. If a person is in the hospital for any serious issue, usually they will have a family member by their bedside at all times. Thus, many people in my culture go through the dying process surrounded by loved ones. Russian culture is full of superstitions, so death is not to be discussed. Children of elderly parents want to be the ones to receive news of the condition or prognosis, in order to shield their parents from any possible bad news. I know many people who chose to have their family members live out their last days in their own home rather than at a healthcare facility, because the most important thing is for the person to be comfortable as they pass.

In the Jewish religion, once a person passes it is customary for the body to not be left alone until the burial. The body is considered sacred, and thus will rarely be donated to science or for organ donation. Cremation is also

forbidden in the religion. Unless it is the Sabbath, Jews typically want to bury the dead within 24 hours. While an extremely difficult and sorrowful time,