Cultural Diversity and Caring For Patients From the Middle East

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What Is Your Cultural Identity?

• American
• Irish
• Italian-American
• African-American
• Social Worker
• Nurse
• Mom
• Artist
What is Cultural Diversity?

• We All Have It!
• Obvious Manifestations:
  Religion
  Ethnicity (Race)
  National Origin (Language)
  Gender
Cultural Diversity

• Less Obvious Manifestations:
  Age
  Education
  Educational Status
  Mobility (including handicaps)
What Is Culture?

• The sum total of the way of living; includes values, beliefs, standards, language, thinking patterns, behavioral norms, communications styles, etc.

• Guides decisions and actions of a group through time.
The Culture of Western Medicine

• Meliorism-make it better.
• Dominance over nature-take control.
• Activism-do something.
• Timeliness-sooner than later.
• Therapeutic aggressiveness-stronger=better.
• Future orientation-plan, newer=better
• Standardization-treat similar
Ours Versus Others

“Ours”
- Make it Better
- Control Over Nature
- Do Something
- Intervene Now
- Strong Measures
- Plan Ahead—Recent is Best
- Standardize—Treat Everyone the Same

“Others”
- Accept With Grace
- Balance/Harmony with Nature
- Wait and See
- Cautious Deliberation
- Gentle Approach
- Take Life As It Comes—“Time Honored” Individualize—Recognize Differences
Definition of Cultural Competence

- A set of congruent behaviors, practices, attitudes and polices that come together in a system of agency or among professionals
- Enabling effective work to be done in cross-cultural situations
What Do The Following People Have in Common?

- Helen Thomas-Dean of White House Press
- Donna Shalahla-Secretary of Health and Human Services
- John Sununu-Chief of Staff for George Bush
- Darrell Issa-California Congressman
What Do The Following People Have In Common?

• Dr. Mehmet Oz
• Dave Chappele-comedian
• Akon-Rapper
• Iman-model married to late David Bowie
Where Is The Middle East?
Middle East (Western Asia and North Africa)

- Egypt
- Iran
- Iraq
- Israel
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Kuwait
Middle East (cont’)

• Saudi Arabia
• Syria
• Bahrain, Cyprus, Oman, Gaza Strip/Palestine, Qatar, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.
• Non Arab Countries-Cypress, Israel, Turkey and Iran.
The Importance of Family

• Humans develop sense of identity and self-esteem within a particular cultural context or group

• The need to be affiliated with other persons is a universal human need and is VERY strong for Middle Easterners

• During illness or crisis, Middle Eastern rely heavily on their “in-group” instead of trying to cope more individually as many Americans would
How This Impacts Care

• Patient brings 1 or 2 additional people to visit who listen carefully for patient and may answer for patient
• People close to patient consider it a duty to be there
• This closeness may be accompanied with doubt towards those outside the intimate circle
How This Impacts Care Cont’d

- Therefore, family members see it as their duty to ensure patient gets best possible care.
- Persistent and demanding behavior is actually the family’s indulgence of patient and is intended to show their caring - it interferes with professional care.
- Patient may never be left alone by family or friends.
Guidelines for Dealing With Middle Eastern Families

- Does not apply to every individual. Ask questions to understand personal beliefs and behaviors
- Speak first to family spokesman
- Person with most authority is usually the oldest and most educated
- Same sex caregivers may be preferred
- Women may defer to husband’s for their own care and the care of their children
Repetition

• You may see a pattern of **Repetition** which can be interpreted as condescending

• It’s a style of communicating which does not necessarily indicate they think you have not heard

• Repetition recognizes the significance of the matter at hand
High Context Communicators

• Given the intensity and frequency of their relationships, Middle Easterners are highly contextual communicators.

• Middle Easterner needs to know more about the other person than an American for a relationship to develop.

• American culture is low on context-emphasis; it is on the verbal message.
Time Control

• Punctuality is less important to a Middle Easterner and may be late for an appointment or not come at all if a relationship issue arises.

• Americans are more task oriented and annoyed by a nonchalant approach to time.

• While a ME may be offended by the Americans attention to getting things done rather than taking the time to establish a relationship.
Personal Space/Personal Privacy

• Conversational distance between Middle Easterners is twice as close as Americans are used to .... Touch is more frequent
• Middle Easterners touch more frequently
• People from the Middle East tend to resist disclosing detailed information to strangers, including health care professionals until trust is established
Cultural Views of Illness and Dying

• MD is not likely to be questioned.
• Some believe in the “evil eye”
• Preventive Medicine not practiced as commonly in ME
• Medication is heavily used and patients may expect a Rx
• Hospitals are considered a place of misfortune where people go and then die
Cultural Views Cont’d

• Family members do not plan for death.
• Grief is not permitted in the presence of the dying person.
• Once death has occurred, mourning may be loud and obvious.
Trust

• Once trust is established, Middle Easterners are typically cooperative and willing to comply with MD recommendations and treatment plan.
Tools in Dealing with Middle Eastern Patients and Families

• Ask Questions to understand personal beliefs and behaviors

• “In-Group”-Make statements that show an appreciation of the culture, “Tell me about your culture, I love learning about other cultures”.

• “Duty”-Validate family’s role as caregiver

• “Mrs. Ali is so blessed to have you caring/advocating for her”

• “Family”-”You are such a loving family”
Tools (cont’d)

• “Relationship Building” - show that you remember names and other aspects of the family. Tell them something about yourself that they can identify with, “I met you son yesterday, what a caring man”. “I have a teenager as well”. “I love chocolate too”

• **Consistency with Nursing Care**
• Remember the cultural guidelines regarding repetition, space, time and don’t take personally
References

• Issues in Health Care of Middle Eastern Patients. Juliene G. Lipson, RN, PhD, and AFAF I. Meleis, RN, PhD, San Francisco The Western Journal of Medicine

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