



# *Cultural Diversity in Homecare*



## OVERVIEW:

As home health care providers we encounter people from all walks of life. Since home is the primary place which our patients and their families live by their own cultural standards, it is important that we respect their values, beliefs and rituals. Often times gender or race are what we use to define a particular culture when in all reality, either represent a true culture. Cultural awareness is a key component in responding to and communicating with all different types of people. *It is important to know that we will be talking about generalizations and we need to be culturally sensitive and aware to each patient individually.*

## FACTS ABOUT CULTURAL DIVERSITY

“Culture” is a term many people think they understand. However, because the word is often used for describing things other than culture, there is a lot of misunderstanding.

Culture is a social pattern of behaviors, beliefs and characteristics of a group of people that is passed on from generation to generation. *Cultural characteristics and very different from physical characteristics. Many people with the same physical characteristics do not have similar cultural characteristics,* thus, it is important we don't prejudge based on our patients appearance.

## EASTERN ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS (Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Hmong, Indonesians, Filipinos and Samoans)

Often there are special diets taken during times of illness. Fish, fruits, vegetables are the primary diet, along with small amounts of chicken, pork and beef. In most of these cultures, a meal is almost like a ceremony and should not be interrupted. Amongst this group there are also several religions practiced including Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Shintoism, and Roman Catholic. Many times medicinal herbs, folk remedies and rituals are used to prevent or treat illness along with the use of health or spiritual healers. Many believe in reincarnation. Drawing blood may be upsetting to this group. *There is a tendency to hide outward signs of pain, so it may be difficult to make an assessment of patient's actual pain level.*



## HAITIAN, PEURTO RICAN AND CUBAN

Diet is important to this group. Many people believe that food has “hot/cold” properties and these must be balanced to have harmony. Some believe illness is supernatural and caused by evil spirits or enemies of deceased relatives. They may wear amulets to protect against evil spirits. Use of herbs and rituals for healing are common. Many people from this group are suspicious and fear hospitals.

## RELIGION AND FASTING

It is important to keep in mind that not all members of a particular religious group will hold the same beliefs. The term fasting and the beliefs about fasting may vary in different religious groups as well as within believers of the same religious group. Most of the time “fasting” does not mean to totally go without food. There are many different types of fasts. It does commonly refer to light meals, with not snacks in between. *Almost always, rules of fasting do not apply to the elderly or very ill.*

## BAPTIST

Almost all Baptist groups prohibit alcohol as a beverage. Many groups believe in faith healing or “laying on of hands” by preachers or others empowered by God to heal. Many believe medical treatment cures them by God working through the doctors and nurses. Mission work is generally very important to this group. Many may refuse the use of ventilators or resuscitation as they believe it interferes with God’s will.

## CHURCH OF CHRIST. SCIENTIST (Christian Scientist)

No dietary restrictions, however most do not drink alcohol. They are generally opposed to all medications and medical treatment. There are “Practitioners or Readers” who assist families in time of illness. The Christian Scientist Church does not have any type of clergy, priests, or preachers. Lay members lead all services.



ISLAM (Muslin or Nation of Islam) (Ramadan about mid Aug to mid Sept)

Muslims do not eat pork or port products and generally do not use alcohol. During Ramadan (the last month of the Mohammedan year) they do not eat during daylight hours. They accept standard medical care, and generally oppose faith healing. Muslims perform prayers five times daily. There is usually ritual washing after prayers. There are several different sects of Islam and each is somewhat different.

#### JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

Witnesses eat meat, but only if blood has been drained. They are absolutely opposed to blood transfusions, as well as any vaccines made with blood components. Otherwise, they accept standard medical care. They do not participate in or celebrate nonreligious holidays. They do not salute the flag, nor recite any pledges and will not bear arms in military service.

JEWISH (Passover usually end of March to first week April – Hannakuh Usually about 1st week Dec, lasts 8 days)

Dietary habits depend upon whether they are Orthodox, Reform, or Conservative. The Jewish do not eat pork, only meat that comes from animals that eat vegetables, have cloven hooves, or chew their cud. Meat must be ritually slaughtered to make it “kosher”. They do not eat seafood unless it has scales or fins. Orthodox and other Jewish who strictly observe kosher laws never combine meat products and dairy products, and do not store them together. They may have two sets of dishes and two refrigerators; one for meat and one for dairy. During Passover, they do not eat any leavened bread (containing yeast or any products that cause it to ferment and rise). They may refuse surgery during the Sabbath (sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday). Since Kosher foods are high in sodium, patient son low salt diets do not have to use kosher meats. Jewish generally oppose prolonging life with life-support. Amputated limbs and other parts of the body removed by surgery are given to family for burial. On the Sabbath, Orthodox Jews do not use cares, do not cook nor do work of any kind.



## ROMAN CATHOLIC

Catholics fast and do not eat meat on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday. Most still do not eat meat on Fridays during Lent, and some Catholics still follow old practice of not eating meat on any Friday of the year. The Church does not approve use of contraceptives, abortion, or fertility treatments. Most request anointing of the sick during major illness. Homecare patients may refuse to eat or drink for an hour before someone is bringing them communion. The authority over all Roman Catholic churches is the Pope.

## RUSSIAN ORTHODOX OR GREEK ORTHODOX

Although different, they share many of the same beliefs. They do not eat meat/dairy products on Wednesday or Friday. Most believe in divine healing, however they are not opposed to standard medical care. Most Russian Orthodox wear a cross necklace that is only removed when absolutely necessary and replaced as soon as possible. *Never remove a necklace without first asking the patient or family.*

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Do not draw conclusions about a patient based on his or her culture. Every patient has is an individual. We need to recognize that people of different cultural groups might have very different views about eating habits, child rearing, cleanliness, privacy, and health care.
- The more we learn about different cultures and the better understand them, the better clinicians we will be. Always respect and do not interfere with cultural beliefs. Remember that every household is different and the people living there may have different standards and their own rules. One of our biggest roles is to respect the rights of patient in their own homes.
- It is important to be aware and identify what your own cultural beliefs are. Otherwise, you might not know how these beliefs might affect the manner in which you approach other people.



- You should never try to change a patient's cultural beliefs, or try to convert them to your own.
- If you reason to believe that some cultural practices are actually harming your patient, call your Clinical Coordinator to discuss and notify the physician. Don't directly interfere.
- Most importantly, you must realize that not all members of the same cultural group will behave exactly the same.