

ELNEC- For Veterans

End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium

Palliative Care For Veterans

Module 5: Cultural Considerations in Palliative Care

Culture Defined

- System of shared symbols
- Provides security, integrity, belonging
- Constantly evolving
- Making meaning of illness
- Not limited to race or ethnicity



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Cultural Demographics of Veterans



- 23.8 M living Veterans
- 7.5% are women
- 14% of deployed US forces are women
- Largest group from Vietnam (7.9M)
- 60% live in urban areas
- White male (primary gender and race)
- Older Veterans

Reinberg, 2010, US Veterans Advisory Council, 2009a

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Cultural Competence



Campinha-Bacote, 2003

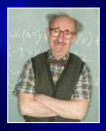
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Components Within Culture

- Ethnicity
- Race
- Gender
- Age
- Religion and spirituality
- Sexual orientation







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Components Within Culture (cont.)



- Differing abilities
- Financial status
- Place of residency
- Employment
- Education level
- Cause of death

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Race/Ethnicity Among Veterans: % Female/Male Origin & Race

Race/Ethnicity	Female	Male
White, Non Hispanics	69%	81%
Hispanics	6%	7%
African Americans	19%	10%
Asians	2%	1%
Native Americans	1%	1%
Pacific Islanders	<1%	<1%

Cultural Demographics: Women in the Military

- Estimated 1.8 M in service in 2010
- 40% have at least a bachelor's degree
- 61.5% from post-Vietnam era
- 240,000 sought care at VA facilities (2006)
- Top 3 diagnoses:
  - –PTSD
  - –Hypertension
  - –Depression



VA, 2007

Cultural Demographics: Different Wars



- World War II
  - –Enthusiastically supported by Americans
  - –Mission enhanced unity
- Korean Conflict
  - –Never officially declared a war
  - –"Forgotten war"
- Cold War
  - –"Atomic Veterans"

Grassman, 2009; VA Advisory Council/NHPCO, 2009a

Cultural Demographics: Different Wars (cont.)

- Vietnam War
  - Soldiers shamed and dishonored
  - Frequently rotated new troops

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Cultural Demographics: Different Wars (cont)

- Gulf War
  - Greeted home as heroes
  - Concerns about toxic agents
- Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)
  - Over 1.7 million deployed
  - Long and multiple deployments

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Cultural Demographics: Poor and Homeless Veterans

- 23% of homeless are Veterans
- 47% served in Vietnam
- 33% served in war zone
- 89% had honorable discharge
- 45% are mentally ill
- 70% have substance abuse problems



National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2009; VA Advisory Council , 2009b

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Providing Care to the Terminally Ill, Poor and Homeless

- Expect trust to be earned over time
- Respect the person's humanity
- Appreciate their unique story
- Recognize/address maladaptive behaviors

Hughes, 2010

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Cultural Demographics: Veterans and Substance Abuse



- Affects ~ 500,000 Veterans who access VA healthcare systems annually
- Alcohol
- Marijuana
- Combat exposure

Department of VA, Department of Defense, 2009

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Cultural Demographics: Veterans Incarcerated

- 225,000 Veterans have been incarcerated (1998)
- 20% saw combat
- ~60% served in the Army
- 35% convicted of homicide or sexual assault



National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2009

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Components of Cultural Assessment

- Veteran, family, community
  - –Birthplace
  - –Ethnic identity
  - –Community
  - –Decision making
  - –Language and communication



Components of Cultural Assessment (cont.)



- Religion
- Food preferences, prohibitions
- Economic situation
- Health beliefs regarding
  - –Death
  - –Grief
  - –Pain
  - –Traditional therapies
  - –Care of the body
  - –Organ donation

Nurse's Self Assessment of Culture

- Self assessment
- Cultural beliefs of co-workers



Cultural Considerations of Communication



- Conversation styles
- Personal space
- Eye contact
- Touch
- View of healthcare professionals
- Learning styles
- Language/gestures

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Role of the Family

- Who makes the decision?
- Who is included in discussions?
- Is full disclosure acceptable?



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Cultural Influences on Decision Making

- Beliefs about autonomy and other values differ
- Disclosure of diagnosis and prognosis
- Ascertain desire for disclosure

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Language Used at the End of Life

- "Discontinuation"
- "DNR"
- "Withdrawing/withholding"

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When Cultures Clash



- Clashes occur
- Assess your reactions
- Never lie
- Offer information
- Use cultural guides

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Conclusion

- Culture is a major influence on end-of-life care
- Self assessment of culture
- Many dimensions of culture
- Culturally sensitive care
- Interdisciplinary care



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