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NUR 4636

04/02/2019

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According to the WHO, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Jakab, 2011). Cuban health heritage in terms of health care is rich and diverse. It has many dimensions that have shaped it and influenced it over a long period of time from religious beliefs to cultural beliefs that have contributed to a healthy state of well-being among its population.

One of the most notable and positive aspects of Cuba is the health care system. Its population is about 11.2 million and a land mass of about the size of Pennsylvania. On average, Cubans earn about $20 per month. Since 1959 Cuba’s infant mortality rate has reduced from 37.3 to 4.3 per 1000 live births. This rate is equivalent to Australia’s and lower than that of the U.S. at 5.8. Its life expectancy has increased over the years from 70 years in the 70s to 78.7, very close to that of U.S. at 79.8 years. The country under the leadership of Fidel Castro prioritized Health (10% of GDP) and Education, its literacy rates stand at 99.98% (Blumental, 2016).

The care system is free and funded by the state, the model prioritizes primary care and public health. At the very grassroots, the system has established polyclinics manned by a physician and a nurse. Perhaps one of the notable features is the requirement for physicians to make home visits to every patient at least once yearly. These polyclinics are also responsible for organizing public health outreach services. The third level is community hospitals that offer secondary services and the last is the third level constitutes of institutes that dispense highly specialized care and offer teaching and research services (Blumental, 2016).

Cubans have become inclined towards American culture due to immigration into the country. Multigenerational living arrangements have declined over the years, family dynamics have shifted and behaviors are changing (Purnell, 2013). These shifting dynamics are likely to be witnessed in health care beliefs. In terms of health seeking beliefs and behaviors, the degree of similarity to other Latin American societies is high, there is a reliance on the family as the primary source of health advice. Elderly women are consulted for traditional home cures for common illnesses. Herbal mixtures are commonly utilized to relieve symptoms that are not severe. Biomedical services are also often used as a primary or secondary option. This is due to the strong primary care system (Purnell, 2013)

The religious influence is also evident in the health care heritage of the country. Santeros are commonly utilized. They are equivalents of priests who perform certain rites to invoke healing and their orthodox practices belongs to the religious docket of *Santeria or Regla de Ocha* which traces its origin from the Yoruba people of Nigeria who immigrated through the slave trade and came with this beliefs. It is a 300-year-old African Cuban religious system constitutes ancient Yoruba beliefs that transects with Roman Catholicism. 30% to 40% of Cubans are Catholics while 55-60% practice Santeria. People who practice Santeria believe in and utilize magical and medicinal properties of flowers, twigs, herbs, and leaves. Some bitter herbs are also believed to banish evil and negative energies, this practice is commonly used to treat physical and emotional issues, a person may be diagnosed by a physician but a santero can be summoned to help in balancing and neutralizing the illness. This practice is present in Miami, New Jersey, and California. Santeros sometimes offer sacrificial offerings at the patient’s bedside but safety and sanitation are always given priority (Purnell, 2013).

Traditional aspects are also notable in the health seeking behaviors of Cubans. Traditional medicinal plants such as tea, potions, salves or poultices are utilized. In the Cuban communities in the U.S. stores known as Botanica sell these products including incense, herbs, ointments believed to relieve pain, reduce bad luck, and or break curses (Purnell, 2013)

There are notable differences in the health beliefs of Cuban American and native Cubans, 85% of Cuban Americans are Roman Catholics, Jews or Christians and therefore do not entirely subscribe to Santeria but have inclined more towards western practices. Blood transfusion and donations are usually acceptable.

Mothers often seek advice from parents, spouses with an inclination on the family network. Family members usually care for the mother and baby for about a month postpartum. Women prefer breastfeeding over weaning. Cutting an infant’s hair or nails in the first 3 weeks is believed to be risky and may cause blindness and deafness.

In Hindu culture, older women offer antenatal and postnatal care. The family network is a common reference point in both cultures (Purnell, 2013). Death is taken seriously in both Cuban and Hindu heritage. Death rites are evident in both cultures, cremation is practiced but more adherence as a matter of religion is evident among the Hindu. In the case of Hindu’s the ashes of the cremated bodies are scattered in holy rivers to appease the souls of the dead. The followers of Santeria light a candle to light up the path of the spirit (Purnell, 2013).

The most notable and differentiating aspect of Hindu health care belief is Ayurveda, it is a traditional system of medicine which stresses on prevention of illness. Principles such as the art of living, proper health care, and self-care are utilized. Self-care has led to a common health problem of the practice of self-medication. Apart from this system, there is Siddha and Unani. All the three medical systems use principles form the tridosha theory which asserts that the body is made up of five elements; air, space, fire water and earth. They seek to create a balance and believe that illnesses gain entry through the mind, body, and soul. To achieve this balance ceremonies and rituals are conducted. Worshiping goddesses, pilgrimage to holy places, pouring water at the roots of sacred trees are believed to appease the planet and prevent illnesses or misfortune. In terms of psychological wellness mental illnesses are associated with divinity and stigmatization is common against those who seek professional psychiatric help. There is a belief that sexual activity and anxiety predisposes one to tuberculosis (Purnell, 2013).

The Greek utilization of biomedicine is dependent on one’s level of education, native Greeks tend to incline towards traditional health beliefs such as an evil eye (matiasma) as a cause of disease which is not different from the Hindu and Cuban beliefs where external forces are believed to cause illness. Perhaps one of the special characteristics is in their health-seeking behaviors, they tend to disregard health-seeking behaviors such as the use of safety belts, high mortality rates due to road accidents is high in Greece. Pregnant women are held with high regard and during antenatal periods they are discouraged from attending funerals or viewing corpse, abstaining from sinful activities and praying to Saint Simeon. Faith has largely influenced the health beliefs of the Greeks. Last rites are administered to the dead such as the partaking of Holy Communion given by a priest, friends, and family gather in the aftermath for a meal of fish (symbolizing Christianity), wine, cheese, and olives. They reject cremation on the basis of the belief of the physical resurrection of the body-Greek orthodox religion. Further, into the congruence between religion and health care beliefs, iconic paintings of Virgin Mary and Christ are believed to be a connection between the natural and the spiritual world. Kissing blessed icons before starting each day is considered to ensure safety and health (Purnell, 2013).

There is an intersection in terms of health practices inspired by a spiritual perspective in all tenets of the three culture (Cuban, Hindu, and Greek), however the similarities are not correlative in terms of one influencing the other, but immigration can be cited as one of the factors that has brought inclinations towards the western health care belief system across the Cuban, Hindu, and Greek heritage in this era.

# References

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