

# La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

Hmong Culture

# Special thanks to...

- Gundersen Health System
- La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium (LMHSC)
- LMHSC Cultural Competency Committee

for their assistance in developing this cultural competency module

# Disclaimer

## Caution on Stereotyping

- The material in this program is generalized and is not intended to perpetuate stereotypes of diverse individuals or groups of people
- Cultural traits may vary based on individual preference and level of acculturation – someone may have physical attributes of a specific heritage, but it does not mean he/she practices the traits of that culture
- Bottom line: Never Assume, Always Ask!
  - ▶ Never assume that every member of any culture holds the same beliefs and ideals
  - ▶ Use this background information to ask culturally sensitive, informed questions

# Background

- The Hmong originate from the country of Laos, located in southeastern Asia
  - Northeast of Thailand & West of Vietnam
  - Also bordered by Burma, Cambodia, & China
- Laos is slightly larger than the state of Utah
- The country is landlocked and is mountainous and thickly forested
  - The Mekong river runs along most of the western border, between Laos and Thailand

# History

- The Hmong first migrated to Laos from China & North Vietnam between 1810 and 1820
  - They established many scattered settlements in the mountains
- The Hmong are a specific group of people from Laos
  - They are distinct in that they live in the mountainous regions of Laos

# Interaction 1 of 5

- Which of the following countries border Laos?  
(Select all that apply)
  - Vietnam
  - Cambodia
  - China
  - Thailand

**Caution on  
Stereotyping**

## Interaction 1 of 5 (Answer)

- Which of the following countries border Laos?  
(Select all that apply)
  - Vietnam
  - Cambodia
  - China
  - Thailand

# Immigration Influences

- March 1953:
  - Communist North Vietnamese forces swept northern Laos, occupied the capital of Sam Neua, and made it Pathet Lao headquarters
- For a period of 10 years:
  - The U.S. Special Forces and the Hmong held off the North Vietnamese
  - A cease fire was ordered for midnight February 21, 1973



# Immigration Influences Continued

- When the war ended:
  - 370,000 refugees were left homeless and were targeted for genocide by Communists who occupied Laos
  - Hmong population is 32% of total refugee population and 70% of 155,000 displaced persons in Xieng Khouang province
  - Around 12,000 Hmong died fighting
  - 45,000 died from starvation, diseases, chemical warfare, and by drowning, while trying to cross the Mekong River

# Statistics

- Immigration to the U.S. began in 1975 and continues today
- Today there are more than 200,000 Hmong people in the U.S.
  - Largely concentrated in:
    - California
    - Minnesota
    - Wisconsin (about 4,000 in La Crosse)

## Interaction 2 of 5

- The Hmong were allied with U.S. forces to fight against the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War.
  - True
  - False

Caution on  
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## Interaction 2 of 5 (Answer)

- The Hmong were allied with U.S. forces to fight against the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War.
  - True
  - False

# Social Structure

- Hmong (rhymes with 'song') in U.S. are referred to as Hmong Americans
- There are 18 clans
  - Family names are based on clan names
    - Common family names for the La Crosse area are: Xiong, Lor, Vue, Lee, Her, Moua, Vang, Yang, Thao, Cha
  - Children earn their father's clan as their last name
  - In-laws give their son-in-law a new or added first name after he has fathered children
- The clan strengthens and bonds the Hmong together and serves as a mediation source for conflict

# Values

- Among place high value on strong, extended families
  - The whole family is expected to visit if a person is ill
  - Highly value elderly people
  - Male family member is main decision maker
- Strong ethical values discourage:
  - Violence
  - Smoking
  - Adultery

# Values Continued

- Extended families educate and train children through oral stories
  - Highly value education – girls were not allowed to attend school in the “old” days
  - Children are taught to love each other and treat others equally
  - Cousins are considered brothers and sisters
  - Although Hmong children who are educated in the U.S. are learning English, it still remains a barrier for many Hmong adults
  - New refugees from Asia may have limited English skills

## Interaction 3 of 5

- There are 30 clans (and last names) in the Hmong culture.
  - True
  - False

Caution on  
Stereotyping



## Interaction 3 of 5 (Answer)

- There are 30 clans (and last names) in the Hmong culture.
  - True
  - False

# Spirituality

- Many Hmong practice Animism
  - Shamanism is a form of practice in the Hmong culture. A shaman is able to connect and communicate between the spirit and physical worlds through negotiation or battle.
  - Animism is a religious system in which people believe that most animals, plants, people, etc. in the world have spirits or souls.
  - The Hmong's religion is "animist", which they believe in ancestral worship and reincarnation.
  - Shaman is one of the main ritual practice by many Hmong families.

# Spirituality Continued

- Some beliefs of the Hmong are:
  - Human and animal lives are connected
  - Humans have more than 12 spirits in a lifetime
  - Everything in the natural world has a spirit
  - There are evil spirits and ancestral spirits of the dead that continue to interact with the living
  - Humans request a permit (life paper) to live on earth for a certain period of time, but may bargain with the spirits for more time
  - Health
    - Massage
    - Herbal medicine
    - Pitching/cupping

# Communication

- Displaying a smile and eye contact is a good thing, however some individuals may not look at you face to face
  - Prolonged eye contact between males and females may be considered flirtatious
  - Avoid shaking hands or hugging with the opposite sex
- It is polite to respect the age hierarchy
  - Direct communication to the elder
- If an interpreter is necessary:
  - Contact your organization for assistance
  - Avoid using family members or friends as interpreters if at all possible

## Interaction 4 of 5

- What is the traditional religion of the Hmong?

(Select one answer)

- Catholicism
- Buddhism
- Shamanism and/or Animism

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## Interaction 4 of 5 (Answer)

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# Spatial Orientation

- Males and females may have formalized behavior with each other
- Touching, patting heads, or shaking hands may not be comfortable
- Any physical contact with a female may be inappropriate

# Sense of Time

- The Hmong are present oriented
  - They have flexible “here and now” persona
  - This may conflict with schedules as defined by Western culture
  - Present oriented individuals may not see a problem arriving 10-15 minutes late, since they will accomplish everything and probably stay late



# Environmental Control

- The Hmong have an external locus of control
  - Although individual actions may have minor influence, the supreme being will control every aspect of the human environment
- This means that many Hmong will not want to prolong life if faced with a terminal illness
  - It might be viewed that the supreme being wants to release the spirit

# Interaction 5 of 5

- Physical contact, particularly between members of the opposite sex, is not abundant within the Hmong culture.
  - True
  - False

Caution on  
Stereotyping

## Interaction 5 of 5 (Answer)

- Physical contact, particularly between members of the opposite sex, is not abundant within the Hmong culture.
  - True
  - False

# Question 1 of 5: Identify the correct choice to complete each of the bulleted statements below:

- The Hmong came from: Choices:
  - a. 57,000
  - b. Laos
  - c. Interaction with spirits of deceased ancestors
  - d. Violence
- Hmong believe in:
- This is highly discouraged in Hmong culture
- Roughly this many Hmong died in the Vietnam war:

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**Question 1 of 5: Identify the correct choice to complete each of the bulleted statements below:  
(Answers)**

- The Hmong came from **Laos**.
- Hmong believe in **interaction with spirits of deceased ancestors**.
- This is highly discouraged in Hmong culture: **violence**
- Roughly this many Hmong died in the Vietnam war: **57,000**

Choices:

- a. 57,000
- b. Laos
- c. Interaction with spirits of deceased ancestors
- d. Violence

## Question 2 of 5

- How many Hmong people are estimated to live in the U.S.?

(Select only one answer)

- 160,000
- 200,000
- 340,000

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## Question 2 of 5 (Answer)

- How many Hmong people are estimated to live in the U.S.?

(Select only one answer)

- 160,000
- 200,000
- 340,000

## Question 3 of 5

- Who educates and trains Hmong children to uphold the ethical values present in the culture?

(Select one answer)

- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Classmates

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## Question 3 of 5 (Answer)

- Who educates and trains Hmong children to uphold the ethical values present in the culture?

(Select one answer)

- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Classmates

## Question 4 of 5

- Smiling and maintaining eye contact with a member of the opposite sex is considered flirtatious in Hmong culture.
  - True
  - False

Caution on  
Stereotyping

## Question 4 of 5 (Answer)

- Smiling and maintaining eye contact with a member of the opposite sex is considered flirtatious in Hmong culture.
  - True
  - False

## Question 5 of 5

- Among people generally believe that they can personally control everything that happens around them.
  - True
  - False

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## Question 5 of 5 (Answer)

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  - True
  - False

# La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

We hope you had a good experience using this module.  
If you have any comments or ideas you would like to  
share about this module, or future modules, please  
contact the LMHSC Cultural Competency Committee at:

[hscinformation@westernnc.edu](mailto:hscinformation@westernnc.edu)

Thank you!



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For additional cultural competency resources,  
please visit the link below:

[http://www.lacrosseconsortium.org/content/c/cultural  
competency learning modules](http://www.lacrosseconsortium.org/content/c/cultural_competency_learning_modules)

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