

La Crosse Medical Health Science Consortium

Native American Indian Culture
for Clinical Providers

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

Traditional Medical Practices: Overview

- Wellness = harmony of body, mind, and spirit
- Body does not have to be perfect
 - Attitude is most important in maintaining wellness
- Harmony and wellness is different for each person
- Physical limitations (i.e. – disabilities, deformities) not blamed for unwellness
 - Can still achieve wellness with physical limitation

Traditional Medical Practices: Who Administers Care?

- Native healers are sometimes referred to as “medicine men”, shamans, healers, or other names, depending on tribe
 - Can be male or female - depending on tribe
 - Healers are usually held in high esteem within the community
 - They are taught by other spiritual healers
 - Some tribes feel that a shaman must be chosen by spirits
 - Healers focus on both spiritual and physical elements for healing

Traditional Medical Practices: Treatment/Procedures

- Illness can be a result of either natural or unnatural elements
 - Natural causes include: violation of moral, religious, or cultural taboos
 - Unnatural causes include: witchcraft or other types of energy manipulations for negative uses
- The healer's contact with the spiritual world, along with rituals, aids in healing illnesses thought to be caused by angering spirits
- Herbs, rituals, and other methods are used to promote physical wellness

Interaction 1 of 4

- Traditional Native American Indians medicine defines wellness as the harmony of the following:

(Select all that apply)

- Body
- Mind
- Environment
- Spirit

**Caution on
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Interaction 1 of 4 (Answer)

- Traditional Native American Indians medicine defines wellness as the harmony of the following:

(Select all that apply)

- Body
- Mind
- Environment
- Spirit

Traditional Medical Practices: Treatment Procedures

- Sweat lodge or other cleansing rituals: used for purification (varies by tribe)
- Herbal Remedies: include many successful treatments that have been adopted by Western medicine
 - Often involve ritual in gathering, preparing, and distributing herbs
- Rituals: could include dances, chants, or other activities thought to aid in healing
- Few specifics are known about healing practices because of secrecy
 - In the past, practice was shunned from Western society
 - Protective of traditional ceremonies passed on for generations

Traditional Medical Practices: Pain Management

- Patient appearing unemotional may be misunderstood by Western society
- Pain usually under-treated amongst Native American patients
 - Pain often described by patient using generalities
 - “I do not feel good” or “I am uncomfortable”
 - If initial comment does not initiate pain management by staff, patient is unlikely to repeat request
- Even during childbirth, women are generally quiet and unemotional

Traditional Medical Practices: Views on Western Medicine

- Western medicine may be accepted in addition to traditional methods; however, some Native American Indians are weary of unfamiliar hospitals and clinics
- Some patients may have difficulty adapting to the series of questions asked by practitioners (language taken literally)
- Writing while the patient is speaking may be viewed as disrespectful
 - Shows lack of interest
- Patients generally may not want to discuss traditional healing practices

Interaction 2 of 4

- Herbal remedies and purification rituals are both elements included in the healing.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Interaction 2 of 4 (Answer)

- Herbal remedies and purification rituals are both elements included in the healing.
 - True
 - False

Biological Variation: Disease Trends

- Top 10 leading causes of death for Native American Indians:
 1. Diseases of heart
 2. Malignant neoplasms
 3. Accidents
 4. Chronic liver disease & cirrhosis
 5. Diabetes mellitus
 6. Chronic lower respiratory diseases
 7. Cerebrovascular diseases
 8. Intentional self-harm
 9. Influenza & pneumonia
 10. Nephritis, nephronic syndrome & nephrosis(National Vital Statistics Report, June 2016)

Biological Variation: Life Expectancy

- The age for NAI is 29.0, compared to 37.2 in the general population.*
- “In terms of age, we are the demographic reverse of the United States as a whole.”
 - Suzan Shown Harjo, The American Indian Experience, 1999

*https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb11-ff22.html

Interaction 3 of 4

- The number one cause of death among Native American Indians is liver disease.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
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Interaction 3 of 4 (Answer)

- The number one cause of death among Native American Indians is liver disease.
 - True
 - False

Preferred End of Life Care: Death and Dying

- Death is viewed as a natural part of the cycle of life
 - The spirit will move on when it is appropriate
 - “Passing on” terminology rather than using the terms “death” or “dying”
- Many patients may look to family members for decision making
 - Expect large amounts of visiting family
- Family may not want patient to be told of terminal illness (always ask head of family if appropriate)
 - Some tribes believe that saying something, will make it happen

Preferred End of Life Care: Death and Dying

- The role of caregiver differs depending on tribe
 - In general, it is expected that family will take care of elderly and sick
- Expect spiritual objects, such as medicine bag/pouch, and items for purification rituals
 - Always ask before touching or moving any of these items

Preferred End of Life Care: Death and Dying

- Dying in the hospital may not be preferred
- Be aware that historically organ donation and autopsy have commonly been viewed negatively for spiritual reasons (always ask)
 - If procedure importance explained, may agree

Interaction 4 of 4

- To Native American Indians, death is viewed as:

(Select only one answer)

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- A blessing to the ill
- A natural part of the life cycle
- A topic that should NEVER be discussed

Interaction 4 of 4 (Answer)

- To Native American Indians, death is viewed as:

(Select only one answer)

- A blessing to the ill
- A natural part of the life cycle
- A topic that should NEVER be discussed

Preferred End of Life Care: Grief and Loss

- Wailing, shrieking, and other visible expressions of grief may occur
 - Again, this varies depending on the tribe
 - Some tribes believe that tears hold the spirit back from moving on
- Some tribes may want a tribal member with the body at all times after death
 - Other tribes may have taboos regarding contact with the dead
- Rituals related to dealing with the deceased are very specific to each tribe; never assume, always ask!

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

- The foci for healing within Native American Indian culture are:
- One type of Native American Indian item used for wellness and healing is a:
- The median age of Native American Indians is:
- Clear expression of pain, according to Western standards, is:

Choices:

- a. Uncommon within Native American Indian cultures
- b. Spiritual and physical
- c. Medicine pouch
- d. 30

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

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

(Answers)

- The foci for healing within Native American Indian culture are **spiritual and physical**.
- A common Native American Indian item used for wellness is a **medicine pouch**.
- The average age of death for Native American Indians is **30**.
- Clear expression of pain, according to Western standards, is **uncommon within Native American Indian cultures**.

Choices:

- a. Uncommon within Native American Indian cultures
- b. Spiritual and physical
- c. Medicine pouch
- d. 30

Question 2 of 5

- Because wellness involves both spiritual and physical elements, traditional healers incorporate methods to address both of these areas.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
Stereotyping**

Question 2 of 5 (Answer)

- Because wellness involves both spiritual and physical elements, traditional healers incorporate methods to address both of these areas.
 - True
 - False

Question 3 of 5

- Native American Indians usually feel very comfortable as patients within the culture of Western medicine.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
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Question 3 of 5 (Answer)

- Native American Indians usually feel very comfortable as patients within the culture of Western medicine.
 - True
 - False

Question 4 of 5

- Once you have seen one Native American Indian family grieve, you will know what to expect from all others.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
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Question 4 of 5 (Answer)

- Once you have seen one Native American Indian family grieve, you will know what to expect from all others.
 - True
 - False

Question 5 of 5

- Doctors do not have the right to do whatever they want when preparing for a medical procedure. They should consult with Native American Indian patients before moving spiritual items they may be wearing.
 - True
 - False

**Caution on
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Question 5 of 5 (Answer)

- Doctors do not have the right to do whatever they want when preparing for a medical procedure. They should consult with Native American Indian patients before moving spiritual items they may be wearing.
 - True
 - False

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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

Thank you!



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For additional cultural competency resources,
please visit the [website](#).

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References:

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