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**HEALTH PROMOTION / CULTURAL PAPER**

Culture is a constantly changing belief system of a group of individuals having shared values, knowledge, behavior, attitudes, social norms, manners, experiences, and language that are passed down through each generation. Culture and social norms are strong forces that shape an individual's behavior, beliefs, and desires which influences the person's view of life, health, and illness. Social norms and culture can affect the rapidly growing racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States who are entering the health care system. One of the fast growing ethnic groups in the United States, is the Asian American population, which comprises of approximately 13 million people (MI Oh, 2012, pg. 779). The Asian American population is projected to grow by 213% to 33.4 million people which will represent about 8% of the total United States' population (Tran, 2013, pg. 243). Within this Asian American population, Korean Americans are one of the fastest growing sub-groups (MI Oh, 2012, pg. 780). Given that Asian Americans are a diverse ethnic group of individuals, their welfare poses an unique challenge to the American health care system. In this paper, I will discuss Korean values, practices/customs and beliefs, their view of health and how this view may impact their health, and their substances abuse (leading health objective). In addition, I will discusses five considerations for Korean individuals' health history, and will develop an health promotion plan to help deal with Korean substance abuse.

**Korean Values, Practices, Customs & Beliefs**

Korean culture and customs have a strong, enduring history and homogeneous values that were built over thousands of years. Korean culture values self-control, restraint, and respect, just like many other Asian cultures (Chang, 1997, pg. 37). Korean life has always centered around tightly knit families, with the father being the head of the family. He is responsible for providing shelter, food, and clothes for his family. Koreans believe that family welfare is more important than an individual's needs. A holiday called Ch'usok, shows how family values are important in Korean culture. Each year, Koreans travel to their ancestral homes to memorialize their ancestors by building altars, offering food and prayers, and bowing in respect to their ancestors (Thompson, 2001). Another event that shows Korean family values is Korean New Year. During Korean New Year, many families and relatives get together to share the new year together by visiting the oldest members of their family and bowing towards them in respect and wishing them a happy new year and a long life (Thompson, 2001). Korean society has managed to maintain their culture, beliefs, and values by participating in these events with their families and community.

Korean culture is a male centered society due to Confucianism beliefs. The Confucian system was imported to Korea from China and is based on a sense of duty order and obligation to the family, group and authority (Chang, 1997, pg. 36). The goal of Confucianism is for an individual to attain physical and spiritual harmony. Koreans believe that the disruption in this harmony is what causes illness.

Shamanism is also another belief system in Korean culture. The ideas of Shamanism are the natural world is filled with spirits that are either helpful or harmful. These spirits can be addressed by people with special powers called Shamans, who use herbal medicines, dances, chants, and others ceremonies to contact these spirits (Thompson, 2001). Like Confucianism, Shamanism looks to keep an individual's health and well-being harmonious. Once this spiritual and physical harmony is disrupted, by anything that strains the family unit or the individual, an illness may occur. Many individuals may present with somatic complaints when disharmony has occurred. Somatic complaints are so common that Asian cultures call it "hwa-byung" (Chang, 1997, pg. 38). Hwa-byung is an acceptable way for Asian cultures to talk about their life concerns because they are less likely to express their concerns openly or verbally.

**Korean's View of Health & The Impact on Their Health**

Korean's view of health is similar to the American view of health, they both value healthy interpersonal support and psychological well-being, but there are still many distinct differences. Koreans value of overall well-being is related to living in a comfortable and honorable life, with a smooth harmonious interpersonal relationship (Choe, 2001, pg. 557). Koreans believe that their harmony with the world, with others, with themselves, and with death is what makes them healthy. When one of these is out of balance, this is when a sickness can occur.

To be an effective nurse working with Korean clients, the nurse must understand that health is a global concept for many Koreans, focusing on smooth interpersonal relationships and family unity. I will need to examine my own biases, and values, and accept my clients’ beliefs and valves. I will develop sensitivity and flexibility, and avoid stereotyping. In addition I must remember that for Korean individuals, seeking help may be interpreted as a sign of personal weakness and disharmony in Korean culture.

**Korean Substance Abuse**

The traditional use of alcohol in Korean culture is as old as the country itself. The use of alcohol is part of Korean social customs, which encourage drinking among men, but not among woman. This is partially due to Koreans' believing that alcohol is a food. Alcoholic beverages have been used in traditional and ritualistic activities such as birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, achievements and also as an rite of passage into adulthood from fathers to sons (Sharpe, 2001, pg. 7-8). Alcohol is considered a important and necessary item for encouraging and supporting social Korean customs and communication. Due to alcohol being integrated into Korean customs and culture, Koreans are at risk for many alcohol-related problems.

Research has show that excessive alcohol consumption can have a negative effect on an individual's health, and it also has many social implications. Koreans who are more likely to consume alcoholic beverages are young college graduates, older men, and self-employed individuals (Sharpe, 2001, pg.7-8). Women consuming alcohol was not a socially acceptable behavior in the past, but now attitudes and drinking behaviors are changing. Smoking and secondhand smoking is also another major health issue in Korean culture because Korean men who drink alcohol were also more likely to smoke.

Immigrants from Korea hail from a culture, where men's smoking and secondhand smoke exposure are socially acceptable. Traditional social norms in Korea do not promote smoking by women and children. Among Koreans in the United States, the prevalence of secondhand smoke exposure and men's smoking is higher than any ethnic groups in America (Hughes, 2011, pg.767). Secondhand smoke is the smoke that has been exhaled or breathed out by the person or people smoking. Secondhand smoke exposure is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States (Hughes, 2011, pg.767). Although few Korean women smoke in the United States, the rate of smoking is higher than that expected in women living in Korea. This might relate to higher levels of acculturation in young Korea women in the United States.

Acculturation is when an individual of one cultural group adopts the beliefs, behavior, and social patterns of another cultural groups. Due to acculturation, norms for traditional Korean American women are changing, thereby causing Korean American women to have more liberal views; whereas, Korean men who have been in the United States may be subjected to greater social pressure to stop smoking, than do men living in Korea. More than 90% of Korean males are aware of the relationships between smoking and lung cancer, emphysema, and bronchitis and they hold the belief that smoking is harmful to their health (Kim, 2000, pg 228). Even though Korean men understand that smoking is bad for them, many of them cannot stop smoking because it is a habit and a way for them to relax and calm their nerves. Korean women smoke leisurely and also to calm their nerves, but smoking is a predominately a male activity in Korean American society.

**Considerations for Interview & Health History**

Alcohol and smoking are such integrated aspect of Korean custom that makes it extremely hard for Korean immigrants to stop smoking and drinking. It may take years of acculturation and communication to affect Korean customs. Immigrants from Korea face many healthcare barriers associated with limited English proficiency, lack of health insurance, social norms or customs, as well as age and low levels of education.

* I must consider that Koreans may have limited language skills or comfort with Western medicine, which may affect healthcare participation (MI Oh, 2012, pg.781). This may be due to recent immigration to America and lack of understanding of the English language and American healthcare system. Korean residents of California stated that they have difficulty understanding medical situations at a doctor's office or clinic because they had difficulty speaking and understanding English (MI Oh, 2012, pg.781).
* As an nurse working with Korean client, I must consider that Korean society is an male dominant culture that values respect. These traditional male dominant values make it difficult for wives and females in Korean society to ask males to stop drinking alcohol or smoking because it would be considered disrespectful if an female acted out against a male.
* When I am conducting my health history, I must be aware that Korean clients will avoid direct confrontation and use indirect expressions such as body language and facial cues (Chang, 1997, pg 37). Asian cultures in general are less likely to express their emotions openly or verbally, due to values and customs of harmony between interpersonal relationships.
* Behavior out of the norm may be considered shameful and bring loss of face upon the family rather than the individual. Hence, Koreans may not seek Western health care service if it will bring shame on to their family.
* Age and education also affects substance use among Korean Americans. Many Korean families who have lived in the United States for many years are highly educated and acculturated, may use traditional medicine considerably more than Western medicine ( Kim, 2000, pg.224). This is probably due to the fact that these Korea Americans are able to afford the cost of Western medicine, and have better access to health insurance, but choose not to participate because they may distrust Western doctors. Korean American individuals may not trust the traditional American health system. Due to this, they may use other sources that may be inaccurate, to find health information. During my interview, I must build a trusting and caring environment to encourage my clients to return for regular health checks and encourage them to speak more openly about their health concerns, smoking cessation, and drinking habits.

**Health Promotion Plan**

Asian Americans are at risk for poor health due to a number of lifestyle behaviors that are woven throughout their culture, like smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. These problems have been identified as risk factors of poor health and mortality. Among Korean American communities, tobacco and alcohol use is a way for people to celebrate special occasion and traditions, to relax and be comfortable during social gatherings, and to calm their nerves when tense. Smoking cessation is a priority to prevent diseases because it causes approximately 443,000 death and costs about $97 billion in productivity loses in the United States each year (Benjamin, 2011, pg. 28). Preventing alcohol and smoking use increases an individual's chance of living a long healthy productive life because they can impend judgment, lead to risky behavior and cause many mental and physical disorders and diseases. Excessive alcohol use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, contributing to more than 79,000 deaths per year ( Benjamin, 2011, pg. 31).

In my health promotion plan, I will design a proposal that will try to address smoking and alcohol use among the Korean American communities that holds strong cultural customs. If I received a grants or donations to help a Korean community, I would create a health promotion plan for a community health-center that caters to Korean community. My health promotion would provide culturally appropriate support that would adapt to Korean culture and customs, by hiring health care workers who speak Han-geul and Chosŏn'gŭl (the Korean languages), interpreters and individuals who understand Korea culture and care for clients. I will also improve the Korean community quality of life and their life expectations, by teaching and providing Korean clients ways to stop smoking and to decreasing their alcohol consumption.

Successful smoking and drinking cessation among Korean Americans will require health care workers to understand Korea behavior, knowledge and beliefs about smoking and drinking cessation. To better understand Koreas Americans, we must first understand Korean values, practices, customs, beliefs, gender roles and their length of residency in America. This will require cultural sensitivity to address how to deal with smoking and drinking behaviors in this culture that will benefit Korean social values and customs. These culturally competent efforts will be conducted in partnership with community-based organizations like Korean churches and Korean culture centers etc. that will be convenient to Korean participants. Churches and culture centers are large social networks that can provide support such as immigration orientation and ethnic education which may play roles in the prevention of alcohol consumption and smoking (Kang Sim, 2013, pg. 293).

Koreans are likely to start smoking regularly at an older age than the rest of the American population. Interventions can be designed to prevent smoking initiation by targeting young adults rather than early teens, and participants who are traditional or bicultural, single, and who have friends that smoke. A large percentage of Koreans possess the knowledge and understand the ill health effects of how smoking and drinking can affect their lives, but few of them are able to successfully quit their habit. Since drinking and smoking are ways to relieve stress and they are important parts of Korean cultural and socializing customs. I must realize that these are not easy problems to fix, due to these two substances being such an integrated part of Korean socialization customs among Korean men, peer support groups may help to encourage them to stop smoking and drinking. Korean women, helping them to decrease their stress and anxiety may help them lower their smoking and drinking habits and encourage cessation. Free or low cost smoking and drinking cessation services, including counseling and medication therapy, that are available throughout many health care plans, may also be effective ways to help Korea American individuals to stop smoking. Since many Koreans have trouble understanding English and the American health care system and are often more comfortable using the internet to find health care information, an internet based information site will provide information about smoking and alcohol cessation, support groups, free community checkups and community events. This website would primarily be in Han-geul and Chosŏn'gŭl, with some in English. Korean ethnic media sources like ethnic magazines, newspapers and Korean bases internet sources are important resources that are used regularly by Koreans. My health promotion plan will use these resources to help Korean smoking and drinking cessation by teaching Koreans that there is help available, support groups for them to join, as well as therapy and medicine that will help them quit smoking and decrease their drinking habits. Many of these media and news sources can be made easily available free or inexpensively for Korean Americans, who are more likely to seek health information through these sources (MI Oh, 2012, pg.797).

**Summary**

All in all, culture is a constantly changing shared view of beliefs, values, knowledge, social norms, experiences and language that is passed down through generation. I understand that Korean Americans come from a strong enduring culture that was built on respect, self-control, tightly knit family, male centered values, harmony, community, and traditional customs. All of these aspects and cultural awareness are vital and must be understood and put into uses when caring for Korean Americans. I must be able to interact and accept different cultures, beliefs, and values. If I do not possess cultural awareness, care for many of my clients may be of poor in quality, and it may become difficult for the client, the clients' family, and myself to interact efficiently together. Knowledge and skills of cultural differences can broaden and improve health care system to better serve Korean Americans.

Language and communication are the most important parts of cultural nursing care because language barriers can hinder the access and use of the healthcare system. This may be very detrimental for my clients and their families. I will use ethnic media sources to reach out to many Korean Americans and encourage better health seeking behaviors. To be an effective nurse working with Korean clients, I must also understand that health is a global concept for many Koreans, and I must possess awareness, understand and have the ability to adapt to this culture group.

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