**African American Culture**

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Physical Assessment

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In our society today, the diversity of people that seeks health care continues to grow. As nurses of the 21st century, it will be our duty to cater to them equally. In order to complete such task, we will have to be culturally sensitive to each of the client that we take care of. With the vast array of culture that the United States has, the African Americans are the one that spark my interest. Their culture is rich with different practices, beliefs, values, and customs that can affect how they perceive health care. In order for nurses to be providing the best care, we need to understand the different aspects of their culture and the effect of it on their health care.

Cultural Background

The importance of religion in the African American culture has been documented as far back as the years of slavery. Religion served many purposes to the African American community. One of which is, it served as a way to deal with the oppression brought upon the by the White Americans. It also served as one of their most important way of communicating in secret, “Often Signals as to the time and place of an escape were given then.” (Moore Hines & Boye-Franklin, 1996). Most of the African Americans today practice Christianity and Islam. They are very close to religion spending their Sunday as a family in church or in a mosque.

In their culture, soul food is the main cuisine. It is compose of dishes that are suitable food for physically demanding lifestyle, which was prevalent during the years of slavery. Examples of dishes are fried chicken, fried fish, macaroni and cheese, cornbread, and black peas and rice. Soul food is often high in fat, sodium, and starch (Moore Hines & Boye-Franklin, 1996).

Family aspect of the culture plays a very important role in the community. After the emancipation of slaves, family had a difficulty reuniting. In order for people to be able to have the family support they needed, they formed bonds with older African Americans and extended family. Older members of the society were able to pass on social and cultural traditions such as [religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion) and [manners](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manners) to younger family members. In turn, younger family members care for the older family members when they are unable to care for themselves. (Moore Hines & Boye-Franklin, 1996). This shows how they were able to pass down teachings to the yougner generations even facing adversity with family being separated from one another.

African Americans also had their share of holidays that they celebrate. They celebrate the birthday of one of the most iconic civil right leader, Martin Luther King Jr. They celebrate black history month during the month of February. Kwanzza is a holiday of African Americans that goes along with Christmas. Kwanzza is an alternative to the increasing commercialization of Christmas; it is derived from the harvest rituals of Africans. (Culture 2).

Its also been well documented that African Americans believe that prayer and religiosity to cope with and treat health concerns. (Welch). Weather they believe in Christianity or Islam, they believe that the religion plays the role of being a spiritual support as well as physiological. They believe that there are two types of illness, natural illness and unnatural illness. Natural illness occurs because the person came into contact with unhealthy force of nature, for example cold or impurities of air, food, and water. While unnatural illness is said to be the result of evil influence. (Welch). As a result of this tradition, they are fearful of going to a doctor because they fear mentioning their methods of cure because of the fear of creating a stigma.

Leading Health Objective

With this in mind, the leading health objective that I believe need to be address for the African American is “Nutrition and Weight Status”. Its been supported by many studies that African American has one of the highest percentage of obesity and diseases that comes with it. An article online supports this by stating, “ Minority populations in the U.S. (such as Hispanic and African Americans[1](http://www.sciencedirect.com.citytech.ezproxy.cuny.edu:2048/science/article/pii/S1071581913001067#fn1)) disproportionately experience diet-related health problems. For example, as compared to Caucasians, African Americans are 40% more likely to be hypertensive and obese, and almost two times as likely to have diabetes.” (Parker & Grinter, 2013). This article compared the likelihood of African Americans in comparison to Caucasians to be hypertensive or obese. It clearly shows that there is that there is a greater chance of African American on getting hypertension, obese, or diabetes.

There also have been studies that African Americans tend to seek medical care later that when they are suppose to. An article states that “Due to a feeling that they are treated poorly by health care providers and not provided needed information or not encourage to participate in their care, African Americans are less satisfied with their interactions with their providers”. (Department of Health and Human Services). This shows that African Americans feels like they are not able to have a say on their health care, rather they are force to believe what the provider say and unable to question their decision. With this in mind, this will create a great issue on how we can address the problem with nutrition and weight status in this population. Difficulties for other health care providers to gain the trust of the African American community will be present. Creating a therapeutic relationship will be a priority to health care provider that plans to intervene with the nutrition and weight status of this community.

Considerations for interview

* Do not be judgmental of clients, put away personal opinions and be able to actively listen
* Make sure to build a rapport with clients, it will ease them on opening up about their concern
* Let their opinion play a role on intervention that’s going to be implemented
* Provided a proper setting and privacy for interview
* Be vigilant different practices, foods, beliefs, and the culture of the particular client

Health Promotion Plan

With the African American Culture community, the plan that I suggest to be implemented in order for them to address the problems with their Nutrition and Weight status is to set up health care centers. Health care centers have been well documented to have a positive outcome. A study support this by stating “ For more than 45 years, health centers have delivered comprehensive, high-quality preventive and primary health care to patients regardless of their ability to pay.”(Jupka, Weaver, Sanders-Thompson, Caito & Kreuter, 2008). With this in mind, health care center will serve as a location for the community to get a free physical screening and assessment. It will also address the financial problems that have been prevalent with the African American culture.

If they believe that this health care centers will be able to help them, a place where we can setup this centers would be in their respective places of worship. The African community is very religious as previously stated. So it will be a perfect place for the center to be able to reach out to the community. In this center, nurses that will be working here should be able to carry out task that are both culturally sensitive and will produce positive outcomes. Also the equipments at this center must be up to par. This health care center will focus on educating the clients on how to address the possibility or a current problem with obesity or nutrition. This can be done by correctly establishing which client has conditions and suggesting interventions that will be able to help the clients. For example, with the diet of the African American community, soul food is a prevalent cuisine, which is, composed of fried food. Instead of frying food, a nurse can suggest grilling meat or putting it in the oven. Instead of using butter with cooking vegetables, you can use olive oil. Also instead of using white rice, the client can suggest using brown rice, which takes longer to digest keeping them full longer.

This health care center can also reinforce aspects of the African American culture that will help the community to continue to grow. One of the practices of African American culture is keeping a tight family bond, which is something that will be helpful to the community. This will help children stay out of trouble and learn values from parents or grand parents. With the health care center being in their church or mosque, clients will not have a problem getting there. It will be a perfect place to enhance the bond of families, for example if a family is struggling with a particular problem that a nurse can intervene with, the parish health care center is just within walking distance after a Sunday sermon.

Conclusion

With learning about the African American culture, I was able to have a better understanding how their culture is affecting their health. It gave me a different perspective in how to approach a client form different cultural background. After learning about their culture, I will be able to come up with a plan that I believe will provide a positive outcome without altering their cultural beliefs to the extreme. They will still be able to keep their way of life, but with slight modifications, they can be healthier. Case in fact in adding a health care center in their respective churches or mosque, or by making soul food healthier by cooking food differently. With this in mind, nurses of the future such as myself must be vigilant on learning about the prevalent culture around their hospital in order to build a therapeutic relationship with the clients.

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