Module 5: Cultural Considerations in Palliative Care

**Culture Defined**
- System of shared symbols
- Provides security, integrity, belonging
- Constantly evolving
- Making meaning of illness
- Not limited to race or ethnicity

**Cultural Demographics of Veterans**
- 23.8 M living Veterans
- 7.5% are women
- 14% of deployed US forces are women
- Largest group from Vietnam (7.9M)
- 60% live in urban areas
- White male (primary gender and race)
- Older Veterans

Cultural Competence

Components of Cultural Competence

- Cultural Awareness
- Cultural Desire
- Cultural Encounters
- Cultural Knowledge
- Cultural Skill

Components Within Culture

- Ethnicity
- Race
- Gender
- Age
- Religion and spirituality
- Sexual orientation

Components Within Culture (cont.)

- Differing abilities
- Financial status
- Place of residency
- Employment
- Education level
- Cause of death
### Race/Ethnicity Among Veterans: % Female/Male Origin & Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White, Non Hispanics</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islanders</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cultural Demographics: Women in the Military
- Estimated 1.8 M in service in 2010
- 40% have at least a bachelor's degree
- 61.5% from post-Vietnam era
- 240,000 sought care at VA facilities (2006)
- Top 3 diagnoses:
  - PTSD
  - Hypertension
  - Depression

### Cultural Demographics: Different Wars
- **World War II**
  - Enthusiastically supported by Americans
  - Mission enhanced unity
- **Korean Conflict**
  - Never officially declared a war
  - “Forgotten war”
- **Cold War**
  - “Atomic Veterans”

Grassman, 2009; VA Advisory Council/HPCO, 2009a
Cultural Demographics: Different Wars (cont.)

- Vietnam War
  - Soldiers shamed and dishonored
  - Frequently rotated new troops

- Gulf War
  - Greeted home as heroes
  - Concerns about toxic agents

- Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)
  - Over 1.7 million deployed
  - Long and multiple deployments

Cultural Demographics: Poor and Homeless Veterans

- 23% of homeless are Veterans
- 47% served in Vietnam
- 33% served in war zone
- 89% had honorable discharge
- 45% are mentally ill
- 70% have substance abuse problems

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2009; VA Advisory Council, 2009
Providing Care to the Terminally Ill, Poor and Homeless

• Expect trust to be earned over time
• Respect the person’s humanity
• Appreciate their unique story
• Recognize/address maladaptive behaviors

Hughes, 2010

Cultural Demographics: Veterans and Substance Abuse

• Affects ~ 500,000 Veterans who access VA healthcare systems annually
• Alcohol
• Marijuana
• Combat exposure

Department of VA, Department of Defense, 2009

Cultural Demographics: Veterans Incarcerated

• 225,000 Veterans have been incarcerated (1998)
• 20% saw combat
• ~60% served in the Army
• 35% convicted of homicide or sexual assault

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2009
Components of Cultural Assessment

• Veteran, family, community
  – Birthplace
  – Ethnic identity
  – Community
  – Decision making
  – Language and communication

Components of Cultural Assessment (cont.)

• Religion
• Food preferences, prohibitions
• Economic situation
• Health beliefs regarding
  – Death
  – Grief
  – Pain
  – Traditional therapies
  – Care of the body
  – Organ donation

Nurse’s Self Assessment of Culture

• Self assessment
• Cultural beliefs of co-workers
Cultural Considerations of Communication
- Conversation styles
- Personal space
- Eye contact
- Touch
- View of healthcare professionals
- Learning styles
- Language/gestures

Role of the Family
- Who makes the decision?
- Who is included in discussions?
- Is full disclosure acceptable?

Cultural Influences on Decision Making
- Beliefs about autonomy and other values differ
- Disclosure of diagnosis and prognosis
- Ascertain desire for disclosure
Language Used at the End of Life

- “Discontinuation”
- “DNR”
- “Withdrawing/withholding”

When Cultures Clash

- Clashes occur
- Assess your reactions
- Never lie
- Offer information
- Use cultural guides

Conclusion

- Culture is a major influence on end-of-life care
- Self assessment of culture
- Many dimensions of culture
- Culturally sensitive care
- Interdisciplinary care