

Health in a Culturally Diverse Community Notes

Week 1 – Meaning of health and illness across cultures

What is health?

- Culturally, health consists of ideas about how our body and mind work
- Being healthy is guided by the way we think
- Human bodies are the same worldwide
- However, ideas about the body differ from one culture to the other
- Ideals about body shape and size are culturally constructed

Flow model of health

- Referred to as “flow model” by sobo (1993)
- Emphasis on flow and balance
- The body contains pipes and tubes
- Nothing must block the body’s pipes or tubes
- Occasional laxatives are taken to prevent blockage
- If blockage unattended, toxins can be released into the blood stream
- Therapies that make cultural sense is purging with enemas to re-establish the flow
- Among the Hua of new guinea
- Purges are for cleansing of body systems
- Wastes from the body system are excreted through faeces, flushed out through urine or vomit
- Poison may be drawn out through the skin as in the case of coin rubbing to get rid of illness among Asian culture

Equilibrium model of health

Emphasis is on maintaining a balance in the body system

- Hot and cold balance
 - Illness occurs when the body is too cold or too hot
 - Imbalance can be prevented by not allowing one force to penetrate into another
 - Further cooling or heating of the body can also be used to treat imbalance e.g. if body is heating to get rid of toxins
 - Post –natally, Puerto Rican women avoid cold foods to prevent clots
- Body fluids balance
 - Emphasis is on wetness and dryness
 - Different cultures may pay attention to specific body fluids
 - Maintain the quality and quantity of fluid is crucial to health
 - Liver and bile in French medicine
 - Blood among the African Caribbean
- Humoral system balance
 - Focus is on humor or body substances
 - Physiological workings of the human body as well as the quality of social interaction are crucial in maintain health
 - The body contains four humors or liquid
 1. Blood
 2. Phlegm
 3. Yellow bile
 4. Black bile
 - Each humor has hot/cold; wet/dry component
 - Each humor is associated with complexion or temperament
 - The four humors must be in a balance state to have health
 - Imbalance is treated through purging to remove excesses or by eating special diets
 - Among those that practice Ayurvedic system in North India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and many Arab countries



Yin and Yang

- Yin refers to anything that is dark, moist, watery and female
- Yang centers around anything that is light, dry, fiery and male
- Typical of Chinese medicine, still commonly practiced
- Each body organ is linked with yin or yang
- Basic concept is that of vital life force whereby energy is redirected through acupuncture

Body size and shape-weight

- Societies construct their understanding of obesity
- In many west African countries, a large body size commands more respect and plumpness is considered attractive
- In Jamaican tradition, a respected adult is called a “big” man or woman
- Thinness in these cultures results from stress, suffering or symptom of disease such as HIV infection
- However, in USA and a number of western countries, weight gain is associated with unattractiveness and lack of control with food.
- Low self-esteem, depression and discrimination are reported with weight gain in western countries.

Mind

- Our state of mind is also important to health
- Conscious interactive self
- Maintain good interpersonal relationships
- Suffering or distress may occur with physical symptoms

Illness

- Illness is the individual's experience of being ill, sometimes when no disease can be found.
- Sickness refers to the social response to being unwell, role negotiated with society
- Disease focuses on the pathological process of a health problem, deviation from biological norm
- Being ill does not mean having a disease and vice versa
- An individual's experience of suffering illness leads to seeking intervention
- Recognition of symptoms rely on cultural definitions of health, caused and context of sickness
- Self-defined
- Other-defined
- Health seeking
 - Level of danger to life
 - Interference with lifestyle and activities of daily living

Sick role

Legitimizes sickness under four conditions

- Exemption of sick individual from normal social roles
- Seeing the sickness as not the fault of the person
- Encouraging the sick person to get well quickly
- Charging the sick person to seek technically competent help and cooperation from the doctor

Types of health care categories

- Kleinman's tripartite scheme (1978)
 - Professional (e.g. biomedicine, Ayurveda)
 - He included the non-biomedical practices such as that of Ayurvedic medicine in India to be considered as professional because of the routinized, formalised and professionalised nature involved. However, this is easily forgotten by those that consider Ayurvedic as a folk practice
 - Folk (e.g. faith healing, shamanism)
 - Folk-sector healers are specialists whose practice is based on traditional methods and philosophies.
 - Popular (e.g. mother's care; friends-care)
 - Popular sector treatment is based on shared cultural understanding and is provided by non-specialists such as oneself; one's mother; one's friend or other kin and relations

Emphasis is placed on who provides care and the context in which care is provided.

- O'Connor (1995)
 - Conventional (dominative systems e.g. biomedicine in USA; acupuncture in china)
 - This consists of only official, authorized, authoritative, dominative health care industry or system-whatever this may be in a given cultural context/ or country
 - Vernacular (e.g. mother's care, faith healing)
 - This is similar to Kleinman's popular and folk medicine
- Wardwell (1972)
 - Biomedical (e.g. medical doctors; nurses)
 - Adjunct (e.g. medical technicians)
 - Limited (e.g. dentists; podiatrists)
 - Marginals (e.g. chiropractors)