Health is the culmination of better choices, consistent adherence to healthcare practices, and conscious awareness. The impact of culture on diet, health practices, and belief of illness, are important aspects to consider when coaching a client. They can contribute to misconceptions or a false understanding of a state of health and wellness.

Coaches have a unique opportunity to tap into the flow of how a person’s culture shapes and uniquely enhances or influences decisions about health. While genes are not destiny, a generational historical snapshot can shed light on a client’s current perspective. The verbal and non-verbal messages of the clan are imbedded in our cellular memory as much, or more than our actual DNA (Duiz, 2010). These messages can hinder proactive preventative care or have even fatalistic opinions regarding certain diagnoses. Cultural energies are coded within each of us and can reveal healing strategies never before considered.

So, how do we honor diversity collectively but also individually? There is much to learn from our elders that both positively and negatively affect our current decisions about healthcare practices. Hidden perceptions, impressions, and beliefs can influence wellbeing. The Chinese, for example, do not always believe in telling a patient their diagnosis (Lipson, Dibble, & Minarik, 1996). They believe, this labels the person and can limit their expansive possibilities for healing.

Within the coaching experience, asking questions related to familial healthcare practices are important springboards for discussion. Somatic awareness can also reveal how much ownership the person has in a belief about health or illness. This is a fascinating journey of self-discovery that
traces our roots and can help change behaviors for good.

**Impact of Culture on Diet**

We are all creatures of habit… the good, the bad, and the ugly. Growing up, our cultural influences determine preferences in dietary cuisine. The method of food preparation comes from ancestral recipes and family favorites. Many years ago, I read a book called “The Path of Practice” by Bri Maya Tiwari (2000). The author’s healthcare challenges with ovarian cancer were overwhelming and she retreated to a cottage to “get her affairs in order.” In her reflection and self-discovery, she realized how far removed she was from her country of origin, in terms of preparing, cooking, and adding familiar spices to her recipes. The grinding of coriander or the addition of cayenne brought back a flood of memories from her childhood. It reminded her of cooking with her mother, and the aromas of comfort became a source of healing (Tiwari, 2000).

**Cultural Healthcare Practices**

Rituals play a role in many cultures and are virtually negated in today’s healthcare arena. The simple act of asking a client how they would like to be addressed or knocking before entering a hospital room have gone by the wayside. Honoring the person’s healthcare practices may seem insignificant, but can play a major role in developing a trusting relationship. Determining and supporting what practices continue to play a role as positive health behaviors, as well as renegotiating what practices are negatively affecting health, will be pivotal in coaching sessions. What rituals has your tribe performed when confronted with a serious healthcare challenge? Are there herbal remedies or other practices that have been used for physical ailments? What beliefs do they hold about physicians, hospitals, insurance, imaging, or pharmaceuticals? Level of trust of the healthcare system varies based on perceptions, previous experience, and negative encounters.

**Health Belief Model Based on Culture**

“For the timid…..change is frightening; for the satisfied, change is threatening; for the courageous, change is opportunity.”

*Author Unknown*

Values and culture play a significant role in healthcare choices and decision making. In some cultures, the family is the decision maker in regards to a treatment plan. Culture can guide people’s decisions and can change over time based on new information or clarification of misconceptions. Coaching is a process that incorporates cultural assessment, cultural interpretation, and respectful communication. Interpersonal sensitivity, self-awareness, and nonjudgmental approaches will offer a safe space for in-depth encounters with people from different cultural backgrounds.

A cultural assessment is more than finding one’s ethnic affiliation. The strength of a person’s ethnic identity and influence can be viewed in their opinions about life transitions such as birth, illness, and death. Non-verbal expressions can provide the coach with intuitive information to clarify or acknowledge a sensitive topic. Facial expressions, voice intonation, and body language provide a sense of ideas and the emotional state of the client. Cultural patterning can shade styles of communication that can cause misinterpretation and misconceptions. Every culture has beliefs about personal space, touching, and appropriate eye contact. Being respectful and aware of the individual’s comfort zone in deference to their cultural customs is paramount.

**Illness Beliefs**

Causes of physical or mental illness can be culturally specific. Spiritual or religious orientation may be intertwined with a client’s understanding of illness and appropriate treatment. Cultural perspectives may also influence how clients seek care and also the expectations of caregiving roles within the family. Assuming different roles within the family structure during times of health challenges can reveal unexpected perceptions of cultural impressions and additional stressors.

The nurse coach appreciates diversity and the values of others while honoring them with dignity, compassion, and understanding. He/she listens to different opinions, recognizing that differences create advantages and can lead to creative solutions.

**REFERENCES**


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