

Culturally Sensitive Care in the Setting of an Amish Birth

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Living and working in Central Illinois, the Amish are one of the most prevalent religious cultures healthcare professionals encounter. According to Britannica (2023), the term "Amish" refers to the Christian group founded by Jakob Amman in the late 1700s as an offshoot of the Mennonite Church. The Amish are a religious-based Christian culture, and humility, family, community, and separation from the modern world are the tenets of Amish culture (Britannica, 2023). According to the Arcola Chamber of Commerce (n.d.), nearly four thousand Amish live in Central Illinois, which the majority of the Amish population settling south of Champaign. Britannica (2023) explains that the Amish follow a nonconformist lifestyle. Amish men can be identified by plain, dark-colored suits and long bears, and women with plain, long dresses and bonnets (Britannica, 2023). Overall, the Amish believe in a simple, traditional way of life and seek to avoid the temptations and technology of modern living (Britannica, 2023).

Religion

According to Britannica (2023), Amish is a Christian-based religion closely related to the Mennonite Church. In the Amish culture, religion is truly the way of life, as the cultural norms were largely determined by interpretations of biblical scriptures (Britannica, 2023). The Amish attend weekly church services held in community members' homes, with no more than seventy-five individuals attending (Britannica, 2023). The bishop is the religious leader, and each small gathering will have a bishop present to guide church services (Britannica, 2023).

According to Anderson and Potts (2020), Amish culture extends into their healthcare practices. Anderson and Potts (2020) explain that interactions between healthcare providers and Amish patients should be face-to-face, respectful, simple, and honest. Humility is a tenet of Amish culture, and Amish individuals may be wary of physical interactions with unfamiliar

healthcare providers (Anderson & Potts, 2020). According to Anderson and Potts (2020), men are generally the head of the household in Amish culture, and women may not allow care from men.

Healing Beliefs and Practices

Although the Amish will accept Western, evidence-based medical interventions, this culture strongly values the idea that God allows sickness in His people as a means of suffering to ensure an enduring faith. As such, prayer is often a major component of the healing process. This culture is also privy to traditional/herbal therapies due to their more natural qualities. This includes massage and chiropractic as chief alternatives to Western medicine. This also includes being hesitant to accept prescribed medications, though this may be due to distrust of this entire industry as a money-grubbing institution. At the same time, though, the Amish are known for using dietary supplements, including over-the-counter vitamins (Anderson & Potts, 2020).

Family Life

The family is one of the most important aspects of Amish culture, with families often adding up to seven or more children. When it comes to sharing duties and dividing up chores, the Amish follow a sex-based delegation: men are more likely to do work outdoors, such as tending to farm animals and other manual labor, while women are more likely to work indoors, completing household responsibilities such as laundry, cooking, and cleaning. As stated previously, in Amish society, the husband/father is considered the head of the family, and this does not transcend marriage. In fact, even the wife/mother of the family must remain silent when the father speaks and do as he wishes. Thus, disagreements are rare. In a similar manner, separation during marriage is considered taboo, and divorce is entirely forbidden (Amish 101, 2023).

Communication

In general, the Amish participate in conventional interpersonal communication. According to Anderson and Potts (2020), the Amish are good listeners and prefer a slow conversational pace. Known technological limits exist within the Amish culture, and healthcare professionals will need to use written materials to communicate with Amish patients (Potts & Anderson, 2020). According to Anderson and Potts (2020), generally, husband and wife are equals in healthcare decisions, even though the wife may outwardly allow the husband to make public decisions. Amish families will also seek advice from other family and community members when making healthcare decisions (Anderson & Potts, 2020). When communicating with Amish patients, healthcare professionals need to account for cultural differences, communicate respectfully with both males and females and provide written materials when needed.

Diet

As previously discussed, the Amish are known to utilize dietary supplements, including vitamins. Aside from this exception, the Amish encourage a natural, unrestricted diet. This is often referred to as agrarian, being one of agricultural focus. It is worth noting that, compared to non-Amish Americans, the Amish have a lower incidence of diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia. Theories differ as to the cause of this difference, though one leading idea is that the increased physical activity required of this culture contributes to an overall greater fitness/health (He et al., 2020).

Implications of Core Values on Healthcare in Childbearing Experience:

As discussed in the information presented by Anderson & Potts (2020), one key point of Amish culture in the setting of childbirth is the exclusive presence of female providers, with a

large preference for midwives. This relates to the key Amish tenet of privacy, which gives way to the preference for receiving healthcare from individuals of the same sex. Additionally, the Amish are hesitant to give birth in a hospital setting, though in the instance that they do opt to be admitted for labor, the father may not be present. This is considered normal in the culture, as fathers often leave the home with the rest of the men while the women of the family, women of other families, and the midwife attend the birth. Additionally, as discussed previously, the Amish will accept but prefer not to receive prescribed medications, so this should be expected in the hospital birth. Additionally, the Amish are less likely to openly express pain, so laboring Amish mothers may seem stoic in comparison to the traditionally presenting laboring mother (Anderson & Potts, 2020).

Maternal/Child Setting: Alternatives to Hospital-Based Practices

According to Anderson and Potts (2020), Amish patients are generally interested in non-hospital-based services and seek to decrease health-related costs. When possible, offer Amish patients information on home health services and clinic-based services. Providing Amish patients with information on non-hospital-based alternatives may increase their adherence to treatment and demonstrates cultural competency.

Maternal/Child Setting: Privacy and Modesty

According to Britannica (2023), humility and modesty are important parts of Amish culture. In a hospital setting, Amish patients will likely be uncomfortable with physical procedures and will seek to be covered whenever possible. Allowing for privacy and respecting the patient's desire for modesty will make Amish patient's more comfortable and build trust between the nurse and the patient.

Maternal/Child Setting: Health Education

According to Britannica (2023), Amish individuals only complete schooling through the eighth grade. Subsequently, Amish patients may have relatively low health literacy due to their limited schooling. Anderson and Potts (2020) explain that simple, thorough health education is crucial when working with Amish patients. Additionally, written materials should be provided at an educational level consistent with the patient's needs. Health professionals should take a proactive approach to education when working with Amish patients and explain all interventions, tests, and procedures fully.

Conclusion

Providing culturally sensitive care to Amish patients in the maternal/child setting requires healthcare providers to be aware of their diverse beliefs and practices. By acknowledging and respecting their core values, religious beliefs, health practices, family dynamics, communication norms, and dietary preferences, healthcare professionals can establish rapport and trust with Amish patients, ultimately improving health outcomes and the overall healthcare experience for this unique community.

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