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Clinical Cultural Report: Italian American Culture

N432: Maternal Newborn Care

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January 26, 2024

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The United State of America is a melting pot of cultures that have blended creating a country that embraces the intriguing differences that vary from culture to culture. Each state reports the number of people that identify with each specific culture or various cultures. Illinois reports that 719,470 of Illinois residents identify as solely Italian American, placing Illinois seventh out of fifty states on the list based on the amount of a culture's population in each state. An estimated 2,330,336 Italian Americans reside in the state of New York listed as number one out of fifty states on the listing for residency of the Italian American population (Worldpopulationreview.com, 2024). The percentage of Italian American residents locally within Iroquois county in 2023 recorded as 3.6% with a total of 1,047 total county population. The top culture contributor within Iroquois county is the German American population totaling 9,864 residents recorded within the county contributing to 34.2% of the Iroquois county resident population (Statisticalatlas.com, 2023).

The religious views of the Italian American population often consist of a strong emphasis on the Catholic faith. The Catholic faith includes a strong attendance to Mass, Catholic holidays observed, appointed days, annual confession, communion, following the churches laws concerning marriage, and contributing to tithes and offering. Other religious views practiced by Italian American individuals are the Christian faith (considered separate from the catholic domination), multiple other religious denominations, and non-religious based spiritual choices as well (Totalitalian.com, 2020).

Often Italian Americans speak not only English but also Italian which consists of multiple dialects of the language depending on the family's original location within the old

country in Italy. Italian culture communication is often noted for being highly expressive during conversation, while utilizing hand or whole-body gestures while talking to each other. It is normal to greet other family members or friends with a hug and kiss. Greeting strangers with a handshake and strong eye contact is considered appropriate, eye contact is considered highly important and respectful. The lack of eye contact is considered disrespectful or rude and can lead to a patient losing the ability to trust the medical professional providing care (Totalitalian.com, 2020).

Family often is reportedly considered to be at the center of an Italian family's core, placing the importance of family and their allegiance to the family above everything, even ranking above their faith at times. The emphasis on becoming highly educated and a deep respect for a hard work ethic is a cornerstone for Italian American culture which also embraces the male role of providing for the family. Traditionally Italian families consider the father to be the head of the household making decisions for the family to become successful on a broader scale. The mother oversees the day-to-day functions within the Italian American family and is in control of the organization and functionality of the family for everything to run smoothly. The family dynamic embraces children living at home with the family until later in life, the importance of eating family meals together, respecting the families elders, and ensuring that provided care is from family members or a member of the extended family that are able to provide the required care within the home for an ill or elderly family member rather than seeking sources outside of the home or family to care for these family members in need of assistance (Totalitalian.com, 2020).

Italian culture embraces the importance of family meals and centers daily and holiday family gatherings around a large meal that often may take days to prepare. These meals include

meats, pasta, bread, eggs, cheese, oils, vegetables, and a vast arrangement of herbs and are used together to cook large hearty meals for large families. With the traditional diet consisting of the intake of larger amounts of carbohydrates and fats obesity and diabetes are leading health concerns amongst the Italian American culture. Health concerns need to be monitored and addressed with the patient and family. The ability to provide patient education for dietary health concerns will need to be provided based on information that directly explains what changes need to be considered within the patient's diet. This assists in the avoidance of health risks and must be provided in a considerate manner and not disrespectful to the patient's cultural norms. Nursing staff must always remember to speak with the patient when admitted into the hospital to determine any culturally influenced dietary needs that will need to be followed. Nursing staff should also assist in providing the patient with options that are available within the diet that the provider has set into place for the patient (Nursinganswers.net, 2020).

Italian American culture prefers to embrace gender roles within their culture including women providing care for the ill or elderly. Often the family is consulted concerning health issues and care before reaching out to a medical professional. The belief that fresh air and home remedies can cure an illness is entertained before discussing if seeking a medical professional is necessary. Multiple members of the family often attend a doctor's visit to discuss the family members' suggested care and treatment of an illness. It is preferred that the medical provider greets the family members with a handshake and eye contact to assist in creating a respectful atmosphere that creates trust between the family members, patient, and the medical provider. Women are not discouraged from speaking to their medical providers and most family members in attendance are involved in the patient's care throughout the medical process as well (Nursinganswers.net, 2020).

When palliative care becomes necessary, being culturally competent is a key element to caring for patients and their families during this time. Often Italian Americans prefer a priest from their specific denomination and for family members and close friends to be present during the end-of-life stages (Nursinganswers.net, 2020). It is important that medical staff offer to make all possible cultural comforts available to the patient and their family during this time, providing a comforting peaceful atmosphere.

During the beginning of life including pregnancy, birth, and labor the Italian American embraces many of their ancestor's traditions to provide protection for the baby by utilizing superstitious ways to keep the pregnant mother and her baby safe. Italian tradition does not include a baby shower before the birth because tradition states that when providing gifts to a mother or her unborn baby it could result in bad luck for the mother and infant. Baby showers or gifts will be involved in celebrating after the infant is born and not before. Often large gatherings of family and friends occur within the hospital room after the mother has given birth and gifts may be provided to the mother and infant at that time or once they return home. Italian American traditions surrounding birth also include naming the baby a traditional Italian name or after a Saint within the Catholic faith. Tradition may result in a specific grandparent's name being given to children within a specific birth order. The parents provide the infant with godparents to assist in the spiritual guidance and spiritual education throughout the child's life; this is an important tradition to parents that are rooted within the Catholic faith. Placing a birth ribbon on the hospital door and home door to assist in announcing the birth is often tradition. The parents may place a good luck shirt on the infant by the name of Camicia Della Fortuna which is passed down from previous generations to be worn after birth. The infant's baptism is important to ensure the

infant's spiritual wellbeing and is often performed within the first two months of life (Mominitaly.com, 2023).

Healthcare within Italian American culture often consists of patients embracing folk medicine or ideas that derive from their heritage. This includes remedies passed down from generation to generation that include utilizing oils, religious rituals, herbal remedies, or other traditions that assist in maintaining proper health. Women's health concerning pregnancy, birth, and the post-partum period is often provided by medical staff within a gynecologist's office and hospital with no stipulations outside of the usual provided care. Women within the culture may choose to be cared for by a female provider rather than a male provider due to the patient's personal preference due to the exposure of her body. In some situations, if a female provider is not available a delay in medical treatment could occur as a result. The ability to maintain a private room for hospital stays may be requested to maintain an environment that is considered free of unnecessary germs from other patients. The importance of a well-ventilated room is often noted because of the importance of fresh air to maintain health or for healing purposes utilized by Italian culture. Medical staff should understand that within Italian culture air may not be perceived as healthy when surgery is involved, the possibility of the patient's organs becoming exposed to air is thought to result in health associated complications. Italian American culture utilizes religious beliefs to assist with healing and protection from illness and disease, often placing faith for healing within their religious beliefs before utilizing medical care from a medical professional. Pain is historically feared within Italian culture assuming that is being experienced due to an outside evil or unnatural presence. Death is not often feared predominantly because of the religious faith providing comfort within the culture and maintaining the understanding that it is a rite of passage for all believers (Nursingbird.com, 2023).

The Italian American culture's core values provide healthcare professionals with the ability to provide medical care for the patient and the patient's family in a respectful manner. By simply making eye contact and a firm handshake at the first encounter with the patient and the family you can begin the first steps needed towards a trusting medical relationship. By respecting Italian American culture and all core values included within the culture you maintain the ability to provide care that is respectful and culturally competent. By understanding the client's importance of religious beliefs, family dynamics, dietary importance, communication needs, and medical related needs you maintain the ability to provide the clients with culturally competent healthcare. Specifically related to pregnancy and the childbirth process, many cultural traditions are followed to protect the baby and mother while providing the infant with the necessary spiritual protection throughout their life. It is important to be understanding and respectful of this process to not offend or interfere with any cultural traditions that may impact the patient emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Understanding your own awareness of the culture, demonstrating knowledge, understanding cultural needs of your patient, respecting cultural norms, not making assumptions, clarifying any differences, being open minded, and accepting responsibility for personal education is all a part of providing each client with the necessary cultural competence that they are entitled to.

When providing care to the Italian American population the first encounter impacts your entire professional relationship with your patient and their family. I suggest providing the family and patient with a firm handshake and direct eye contact during the first introduction to establish a level of respect and professionalism. Provide an adequate level of understanding concerning the spiritual needs of the client and family during all interactions. Open communication about any religious beliefs that should be followed during the patient's care is necessary because this is

of high importance to Italian American culture. Lastly ensure that you are understanding and respectful of the steps the patient has taken for healthcare concerns prior to reaching out to a healthcare professional. This includes herbal remedies, utilizing the purity of the air, spiritual healing or guidance, and consulting family members about their healthcare needs and remedies before contacting a health care professional. Respect for each culture is highly important when caring for individuals and understanding their healthcare needs. The ability to understand your personal awareness of a culturally competent approach to a patient's healthcare is imperative. A medical professional's ability to ensure that they are properly educated on the specific cultures in their community is key. Respectfully asking questions, when necessary, rather than making assumptions, is imperative for the care of each patient. I suggest utilizing the golden rule when providing culturally competent care and treating others how you would like to be treated, which is with the utmost respect of culture.

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