

Clinical Cultural Report: Japanese Culture

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Cultural competence is a crucial nursing skill in delivering holistic, quality, patient-centered care (Deering, 2024). Cultural competence is the ability of the nurse to understand and respect a patient's beliefs, customs, and values and integrate these into the plan of care (Deering, 2024). Nurses help and treat diverse patients every day, so it is important to develop cultural competence to provide the highest quality of care effectively. One specific culture that is prevalent locally is Asian Americans, specifically Japanese. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (2020), 747,280 individuals identify as Asian and currently reside in Illinois. Of these, 24,420 Asian-identifying individuals reside in Champaign County (Illinois Department of Public Health, 2020). Although the statistics do not give a specific number of Japanese-identifying individuals, the Japanese culture is a common Asian culture that a nurse may encounter when providing care.

Japanese culture has two main religions, Shintoism and Buddhism, and many Japanese practice both (Stanford Medicine, 2019). Shintoism is a religion based on nature with a belief in gods that exist in all nature and focuses on cleanliness and purity (Stanford Medicine, 2019). The focus on cleanliness and purity is related to one's morals and physical body (Queensland Health, n.d.). Therefore, the Japanese find hygiene important and see hands as impure, causing frequent hand washing (Queensland Health, n.d.). Buddhism in Japan focuses on all living things' dependence on each other and accepting every aspect of life (Stanford Medicine, 2019). The Japanese also have unique beliefs related to pregnancy. In their culture, it is believed that stepping over a placenta, child adoption, sleeping in the same bed with a postpartum woman, or eating a postpartum woman's leftovers can help women become pregnant (Queensland Health, n.d.).

In Japanese culture, family is an important aspect of life. Confucianism has significantly impacted Japanese culture, placing importance on family, social order, and respecting the elders (Stanford Medicine, 2019). For social order, traditionally, the family follows a hierarchy when making family-centered decisions (Stanford Medicine, 2019). The husband/spouse would come first in the hierarchy, and the oldest adult son would follow (Stanford Medicine, 2019). In a traditional Japanese family, the mother takes on the primary parenting role when caring for their children (Katou et al., 2021). Being a mother is seen as a gift; if the mother talks about the difficulties of motherhood, it is considered taboo (Katou et al., 2021).

Communication in the Japanese culture is reserved and controlled. Japanese individuals are nonconfrontational and nonassertive and will agree with others regardless of whether they want to or not (Katou et al., 2021). Japanese patients may not show many expressions and remain stoic. Also, discussions or arguments would never be done in the presence of a physician or nurse (Stanford Medicine, 2019). Physicians, nurses, and other health professionals are greatly respected and treated with authority, so this behavior is viewed as shameful (Stanford Medicine, 2019). The Japanese have a different view of pain than Western culture. The Japanese are very stoic when expressing their feelings and, therefore, view pain as something that should be endured, and expressing complaints is unacceptable (Kersten et al., 2020).

The Japanese have special practices related to pregnancy, birth, postpartum care, and infant care. While pregnant, women should avoid dark-colored foods, such as eggplants, because they are considered to have “cold” energy (Queensland Health, n.d.). Women are also not restricted when it comes to their diet. They do not avoid raw fish or caffeine compared to Western practices (Queensland Health, n.d.). They may, however, be on a diet due to the fear of gaining weight during pregnancy (Queensland Health, n.d.). Women may also not take prenatal

vitamins due to the importance not being emphasized in Japanese culture (Queensland Health, n.d.).

During labor, Japanese women may not accept an epidural due to the belief that birth should be natural (Queensland Health, n.d.). Japanese women are also encouraged by family to eat to give them more strength to push (Queensland Health, n.d.). Also, fathers are typically not present during the delivery (Queensland Health, n.d.). The mothers may ask for a piece of the umbilical cord to take home (Little et al., 2020). The umbilical cord has a special meaning; it symbolizes the connection between the mother and the baby's fate (Little et al., 2020). Keeping the cord is believed to bring good health and luck to the child (Little et al., 2020). After delivery, Japanese women cannot wash their hair until a week postpartum (Queensland Health, n.d.).

Once the mother is ready to go home, they will return to their parent's house for one month (Queensland Health, n.d.). This is done to help the mother rest and recuperate. The family will then take on cleaning and cooking responsibilities (Queensland Health, n.d.). Also, the baby's grandmother typically takes care of them during this time (Queensland Health, n.d.). Regarding infant care, breastfeeding in public is seen as embarrassing, so it is typically avoided (Queensland Health, n.d.).

Nursing care incorporating these cultural values and beliefs into the care plan will provide Japanese patients with better quality care. Respecting the beliefs regarding childbirth is essential in making the mothers feel in control and respected. Also, it will alleviate any additional stress and anxiety the mothers may be feeling. Because of the emphasis on decision-making as a family, full disclosure to the patient alone could be considered unacceptable due to the belief that it causes the patient hopelessness (Stanford Medicine, 2019). To be respectful, the

nurse should communicate with the appropriate hierarchical-ranked family member when disclosing information (Stanford Medicine, 2019). The nurse should also establish an effective patient-nurse relationship. If the patient trusts the nurse and is comfortable, they may be willing to communicate their true feelings with the nurse instead of agreeing to everything or remaining quiet. Lastly, the nurse should educate the mother on the importance of diet and prenatal vitamins. The mother should be educated on avoiding raw fish and caffeine and the importance of prenatal vitamins to prevent neural tube defects.

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