

Cultural Report: South Korean Culture

Savannah Woods

Lakeview College of Nursing

Religion

South Korea has many different religions; the two most popular would be Korean Buddhism and Protestant Christianity. It also has smaller groups who believe in traditional Korean shamanism, Confucianism, and Roman Catholic Christianity. Korea is a very family-oriented country, so it's only natural; they have a large part in the health care process. They have a tradition called "Ganbyeong," which translates to family care. When a family member is sick or in the hospital, it's the family that provides most of the patient's needs. The family feeds them, takes them to the bathroom, and always accompanies them. It very typical for a family member to stay the night until discharge. Reason being that the nurse in Korea takes on a more significant load than other countries. Nurses in Korea can have an average of 31 patients a shift assigned to them, so the family takes on a big part of the caring process.

When it comes to the health care professionals, it is preferred for a woman to do the examinations on other women; either gender can do everything else. For men, it's generally ok for either gender to be providing the care.

Healing beliefs and practices

For most of the Korean population having good health is a high priority. When someone is sick, they will always take some medication or a natural herbal remedy to recover quickly.

When it comes to their pain, they tend to downplay its severity.

Korea also has some unique practices for postpartum women. Typically, they are advised not to shower for at least a week. They cannot put their hands in cold water or leave the house for the first three weeks. People will also bring you seaweed soup for months.

Family Life

Typically, in a Korean family home, the father is the head of the household and makes the final decisions. Though the mother still has a lot of say in the house's matters and tends to have a significant influence on the father's choices.

Elders are highly respected in Korean culture and are always treated with respect. They have a tradition that whenever going out to eat with someone, the older one will pay as a way to show they can care for them, and it creates an ongoing cycle of respect. Often, elders will live with family instead of being put in nursing homes, as care is family oriented.

Communication

In Korea, women have become very independent compared to the past. Women were already respected in their culture, but now it's more for what they can do instead of because of the stereotypically women's role in the household. They can speak for themselves and to whoever they want to. Men do not hold as much power in the relationships as they use to, and even if there is a more traditional family, the women still have a significant influence.

There are many verbal, and nonverbal communication norms/actions that Korea has that are interesting. Starting with verbal communication, they have two different forms of speech. They have a formal, which is used towards strangers or towards people who deserve respect, such as their boss. Then there is informal which is used between family and friends. For nonverbal communication, something as simple as a handshake is taken seriously. When shaking someone's hand or receiving something from someone, you use both hands. Using one hand is disrespectful, and the right hand is preferred if you do use one hand. When doing so, have the other holding the reaching hand's elbow. You never go over to a family's house without bringing something, such as fruit or flowers. You bow to one another to show respect, the deeper the bow, the deeper the respect. Another meaningful gesture would be the come here signal. You would

not motion someone to come here with your finger; it's disrespectful. Instead, you would motion with your full hand in a backward shooping motion.

Diet

New mothers will be eating seaweed soup for months after birth as it is seen as a celebratory food. It is also the food they are typically eating on birthdays to celebrate.

If a Korean woman were to have a baby in the US, our food would probably be far from what they would prefer to eat. They are a country that is big on meat, noodles of different kinds, rice, and general healthy foods such as lots of fruits and veggies. So, they probably would not get the seaweed soup unless family brought it in. If they had to eat only what the hospital had, they would most likely pick meals with chicken, fruit, veggies, and maybe some beef or rice.

Tips/suggestions

1. Take into account that they may not be being truthful about their pain severity.
2. When caring for a female patient ask if a male is ok to examine them or if they'd prefer a female.
3. Try to obtain food that closest to their culture as possible, it'll help them feel more at home and satisfied.
4. Do not start off to friendly unless they do first, typically with strangers they will have a very formal demeanor until comfortable.

References

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