Cultural competence in End of Life Care for Asian Indian Immigrants

Farhana Kanth
Dalhousie University
School of Health Services Administration

September 8, 2006

www.nels.dal.ca
Copyright for this presentation belongs to the author. Permission for its use is granted for non-profit purposes to improve the education and provision of palliative and end of life care.  
In all instances where this source is used, it should be cited and the author contacted regarding copyright privileges.

Any questions or comments may be directed to:  
NELS@dal.ca
Outline

- Methodology
- Multiculturalism in Canada
- Culture and Palliative Care
- Asian Indian immigrants
- Concepts in Cultural competence
- Culturally Competent Palliative Care
- Conclusions

Civilization will judge us by the way we treat our minorities

Mahatma Gandhi

www.nels.dal.ca
Methodology

- Literature Review
  - Electronic and print journals, books, publications and web sources from 1985 to 2006.
  - Key words used in search: East Indian, Palliative care, Death, Dying, Indian religions, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Hospice, Cultural Competence, End of life, Religious beliefs etc
  - Search engines and Sources: Pubmed, Proquest, Google Scholar, Google, Novanet libraries

- Lived Experiences
  - Professional and personal experiences in multicultural environments like India, Saudi Arabia and Canada
Multiculturalism in Canada

- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes multiculturalism as constitutional (1982)
- Multiculturalism Act commits the Government of Canada to helping communities in bringing about equal access and participation for all Canadians (irrespective of their origins) in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the nation (1988)
- Cultural Mosaic and not a Melting pot: The Act gives the right to individuals to practice the religion, belief and customs of their ethno cultural heritage and denies the notion that everyone must fit into some set mold
Palliative Care and Culture

“Palliative Care is the physical, psychological, social and spiritual care to individuals suffering from life threatening conditions”-WHO

Understanding of culture and its role in caring is important for professionals providing end of life care since cultural perspectives influence attitudes towards sickness, dying, death and grief.
Asian Indian immigrants

Demographics (2001 census, Statistics Canada)
- Second largest group of Asian Canadians in most cities
- 2180 Asian Indian Canadians in Halifax

Diversity of the Indian Culture
- Languages: 1652 languages and dialects - 18 official and 2 national
- Subcultures: Gujrati, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam
- Religions: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism

www.nels.dal.ca
Religions of India

- **Hinduism**
  - God can be worshipped in many forms
  - Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva are the 3 main gods
  - Beliefs around end of life: Karma and Rebirth
  - Sacred Text: *Bhagavad Gita*
  - Symbol: Om
  - Holidays: Holi and Diwali
Religions of India

Islam
- Belief in One God - Allah and Prophet Muhammad
- 5 Pillars of Islam
- Major sects - Shia, Sunni, Sufism in India
- Belief in after life and Day of Judgment
- Sacred Text: Holy Quran
- Symbol: Crescent and star
- Holidays: Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha

www.nels.dal.ca
Religions of India

Sikhism

- Belief in one God - Wahe Guru
- 5 Signs - Hair & beard unshorn, Comb, Dagger, Knee-length pants, and Bracelet
- Follow teachings of 10 Gurus
- Sacred Text: Guru Granth Sahib
- Symbol: Glyph (Khanda)
- Special Holiday: Baisakhi
Religions of India

**Christianity**

- Belief in Trinity - one God, Jesus His son and the Holy Spirit
- Many sects: Roman Catholic, Protestant, Syrian Catholic
- Belief in resurrection
- Sacred Text: **Holy Bible**
- Symbol: **Cross**
- Special Holiday: **Christmas**
Religions of India

Zoroastrianism
- One Creator (Ahura Mazda) and Prophet Zarusthra
- Belief in judgment of soul after death
- Sacred Text: Holy Zend Avesta
- Symbol: Faravahar
- Special Holiday: Navroz

Judaism
- One Yahweh (God) and Prophet Moses
- Belief in judgment after death
- Sacred Text: Holy Torah
- Symbol: Magen (Star) David
- Special Holiday: Hanukkah
Religions of India

**Jainism**
- Follow teachings of Mahavira
- Belief in cycle of birth and death
- Sacred Text: *Akaranga, Kalpa Sutra*
- Sacred Symbol: *Ahimsa (Peace)*
- Special holiday: *Birthday of Mahavira*

**Buddhism**
- Follow teachings of Lord Buddha
- Belief in “eight fold path” for Moksha
- Sacred Text: *Tripitaka*
- Sacred Symbol: *Dharmachakra (Wheel)*
- Special holiday: *Birthday of Buddha*
Concepts in Cultural competence

- Cultural competence
- Culture, Subcultures and Ethnicity
  - Hierarchical versus Egalitarian cultures
- Acculturation and Assimilation
- Stereotypes and Generalizations
- Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism
- Emic and Etic perspectives of Culture
Cultural considerations for Palliative care

- **Home, hospice or hospital?**
  - Home preferred but hospice use can be encouraged

- **Patient Autonomy and decision making**
  - Physician and family based decision making preferred over autonomy

- **Language and Communication in the hospice**
  - **Language** - Most understand English
  - **Disclosing Diagnosis** – Often conveyed to family first, sensitivity and subtleness important.
  - **Taboo words** - Death, Dying, Cancer-non verbal cues, indirect nuances preferred over truth telling.

www.nels.dal.ca
Cultural considerations for Palliative care

- **Role of family in caring**
  - Caring for the sick and dying is the duty of the family

- **Attitude towards pain relief**
  - Less demanding, more tolerant with possible myths about addiction and dependency

- **Diet and food in the hospice**
  - Cultural and religious differences in eating habits of people. Restrictions on beef for Hindus, restrictions on pork for Muslims etc.

- **Toilet and washroom habits**
  - Cultural differences related to sanitizing after washroom use, running water preferred over baths.

www.nels.dal.ca
Cultural considerations for Palliative care

**Self Care**
- The family takes care of the sick particularly if it is an elderly member

**Cultural Beliefs**
- Evil Eye is neutralized in different ways
- Reciprocity with gifts quite common in Asian cultures

**Religious Practices and Beliefs**
- Most revert to traditional ways in stress or a serious illness
- Influence of religious practices and symbols
- Exchange of greeting on their specific holidays

www.nels.dal.ca
Cultural considerations for Palliative care

Alternative Medicines - Ayurveda

- Health is a dynamic integration between environment, body, mind and spirit and not just an absence of disease

- Healing by
  - Lifestyle changes
  - Herbal supplements
  - Meditation
  - Nutritional and dietary regimens
  - Breathing exercises

www.nels.dal.ca
Cultural considerations for Palliative Care

- **Advance Directives, Prolongation of life and Euthanasia**
  - Advance directive uncommon
  - Prolongation of life generally unacceptable
  - Attitude towards euthanasia varies across faiths

- **Post mortem and Organ Donation**
  - Religious sentiments make these generally unacceptable unless necessary

---

www.nels.dal.ca
Cultural considerations for Palliative care

Death and Dying Rituals, Funeral and burial Practices
- Hindus - Cremation
- Muslims - Burial
- Sikhs - Cremation
- Zoroastrians - Towers of Silences

Bereavement and Expression of Grief
- Grieving is generally associated with a lot of emotions often expressed as crying and wailing
- Visiting the bereaved to offer condolences is a religious duty

www.nels.dal.ca
Conclusions

- ‘Asian Indian’ is a heterogeneous group
- Individualized care plans
- Family involvement in decision making and care
- Accommodation of religious practices & beliefs
- Awareness of religious influences on food
- Same sex caregivers preferred
- Anticipation of pain relief in spite of patients inhibitions
- Involvement of cultural health interpreters and volunteers
References

References

Thank you

- Thanks to Grace Johnston for giving me this opportunity
- Very special thanks to Victor Maddalena for continuous support and guidance
- A big thank you to Judy Simpson, Donna Smith, Sharon Murdoch, Joy Tarasuk, Patricia ‘O’ Hollaran, Gurinder Dillon, Swarna Weerasinghe, Merrie Mills and Dr Bhatia for taking time to meet with me