

# BLACK/ AFRICAN AMERICANS

## Cultural Competence Generalities

*This is general information designed to provide information about common traditions, traits and experiences of a group. This information is not intended to nor should it be used to stereotype an individual. Personal experiences will vary. Generation gaps exist along with educational & economic differences. It is always best to ask.*

**Remember the "Platinum Rule"- treat others as they want to be treated**

## Overview:

The US Census Bureau defines the terms "Black or African American" as people having origins in any of the Black race groups in the US; peoples of African descent living in the US today. The name or label preference often lies along generational and geographical lines.

## Religion and Spirituality

The importance of faith, as part of the traditional African American existence, should not be underestimated; it is present and may govern many aspects of life.

- attend places of worship (particularly church) more frequently
- may believe prayer and good thoughts are just as effective as medical attention
- Faith Healers heal by "laying on of hands" on the sick person

## Concept of Health

Most African Americans believe that God has a great influence over health. Traditional concepts of health, rooted in African Beliefs, emphasize harmony (with the social and natural worlds) and do not distinguish between mind, body and spirit. (Spector 2004)

## Language & Communication

English is the primary language of African Americans. However, immigrants from various regions that are classified as African American speak an array of languages. African Americans tend to be more openly expressive: verbal emotion, closer body spacing and ask questions directly. Children may avoid direct eye contact with adults out of respect.

## Family

- In traditional Black culture, family bonds and respect for elders are extremely important
- Close family friends may be referred to as cousin, sister, brother, aunt and uncle despite actual familial relation and be considered extended family support may be through friends (WFH Associates 2011)
- Large numbers of family members & friends may gather to support the patient
- The Black female has become the head of household in many families
- Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered taboo especially in older generations

## Dietary Norms

Average American meal pattern of three meals per day with largest meal at late afternoon

- Many African Americans are lactose intolerant (up to 80%)

**Traditional foods** are rich in nutrients, such as collard greens and other leafy green and yellow vegetables, legumes, beans, rice, and potatoes

- Ensure recommended diet is within means and regular diet

## Gender Roles

- Often, men and women will believe in both gender equality and some traditional gender roles
- In multi-generational female centered households, the oldest woman generally has a great deal of influence over health decisions

## Personal Appearance

- Personal appearance is important to many African Americans.

## Illness Related Issues – Barriers to Healthcare

African American beliefs about physical illness vary depending on age, education, socioeconomic status and place of residence. Some may prefer to treat themselves with home remedies and prayer. Some older African Americans might refuse pain medication or treatments, or decide not to visit a doctor, because they see illness and death as something that is inevitable.

- Important to take the time to explain diagnoses, sickness, and treatments as fully as possible.
- The cultural value placed on being "strong" may hinder some African Americans from seeking mental health services

**Labor, Birth & After Care** - Levels of prenatal care generally correlate with education and access to care. **The laboring mother** may be quite active and expressive. Often, older women in the new mother's family will care for the mother and baby.

## Death, Dying & Bereavement

Many African Americans have a strong sense of obligation to gather at the time of death. Family members will often gather for a prayer vigil to assist the dying person to transition into the next life. The terms "transition", "passing" or "passed away" are typically used to describe death. (Barrett 2001)

- Funerals tend to be longer, draw more mourners, and appear to be celebratory in nature. (Berman 2003). Eulogies are extremely important in African American funerals. Some mourners may experience "falling out" - a sudden collapse, paralysis and inability to speak during the death and or burial of a loved one. (Campinha-Bacote 1998)
- Mourning can be considered emotionally expressive, possibly loud crying out and should not be taken as anger; it may be that the person has a hard time accepting the death of a loved one – more common in younger generations (WFH Associates 2011)
- Family conflicts regarding death may arise – it is best to seek out the more relaxed family member, matriarch, patriarch or eldest family member or pastor to help work with the family and confirm if there is anyone who should be excluded at this time (2011 WFH Associates )

**End of Life:** Among deeply religious African Americans, discussing end-of-life issues can be seen as inappropriate or bad luck (Reese 1999). Due to a strong belief that God controls life and death, many African Americans do not have existing healthcare directives (older generation). Others may not be aware of healthcare directive options. (WFH Associates 2011)

- Working with close family member to assist patient in creating or obtaining healthcare directives from patient is essential & ensure designated person is aware of their role(WFH Associates 2011)

## Treatment Issues

It is important to be aware of the potential for mistrust of hospitals among some African Americans, More so in older generation. (Tuskegee Experiment) May be necessary to spend more time establishing trust- doing things like avoid using high level medical terms, include a caregiver of similar background and using teach-back to ensure patient understanding may increase trust

Low rates of preventive care and limited participation in health promotion activities particularly urban poor, rural people, and the elderly

- Provide information in basic terms in a thorough manner and ask the patient to ask you questions. Work with family, ask patient if they understand and how they understand it to confirm information received is understood(WFH Associates 2011)
- Generally, this population is not opposed to taking medication as long as it is thoroughly explained

**Blood:** Many older African Americans believe certain illnesses are caused by "bad blood"; fear of "bad blood" & apprehension when blood transfer is involved.

**Depression:** More likely than other groups to report depression and other psychological disorders as a physical problem; common complaints include: headache, abdominal pain, muscle pain, neck and lower back and fatigue. Likely to say "I have bad nerves"

**Pain:** Often there is a discrepancy in pain management because of the difference in pain perception by patient, family and healthcare provider and the amount of analgesics necessary to treat the pain (Kotila 2005).

## Health Disparities

African Americans suffer from high rates of chronic diseases, including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity and stroke.

- **Lung cancer** 50% more likely to develop lung cancer than their white counterparts.
- **Obesity** in 2006, 35% of African Americans were obese.
- **Diabetes** mellitus is among the most serious health problems facing African Americans. In 2002, Diabetes the fourth leading cause of death for this population.
- **Infant mortality** rate for African Americans is more than twice the infant mortality rate for Caucasians. Almost 14 out of 1,000 African American infants die, compared to six out of 1,000 Caucasian infants. (Infant Mortality 2009)

**Traditional Home Remedies** (this is not an exhaustive list)

**Blood pressure "high blood"** may be controlled through avoidance of fried foods, salt, red meats

**Blood pressure or Low Iron,** consumption of vinegar, lemon and garlic, red and organ meats, greens, eggs, fruit

**Colic** Catnip and chamomile tea, dastoria and asafetida

**Fever** Tylenol, isopropyl alcohol rubs, cool baths, cool drinks, sliced potatoes or onions in the socks, warming feet

**Colds** (Spector 2004): hot lemon water, hot peppermint tea with brandy

**Herbal teas** (goldenrod or saffras) may be used for a variety of ailments