

Transcultural Nursing Care within the Chippewa Valley Amish Community

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Eau Claire



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INTRODUCTION

Within the United States, Wisconsin contains the fourth largest population of Amish people. Amish communities in Wisconsin continue to grow in numbers, in fact, Wisconsin has had the largest number of new Amish settlements every year since 2000. As the visual appearance of buggies and bulk food stores is becoming more familiar, understanding the unique culture of the Amish is vitally important, especially in health care.

The purpose of this collaborative project involving the Eau Claire City-County Health Department and the UW-Eau Claire Departments of Languages and Nursing is two-fold. Local healthcare providers will be educated on local Amish health care practices to provide culturally-sensitive care and local resources will be compiled for local Amish communities as well as the health care organizations that serve them. In order to provide the highest level of culturally sensitive care, a comprehensive understanding of the Amish culture and beliefs is integral. The literature will be reviewed with a focus on select health care issues pertinent to the Amish community as identified by the Eau Claire City County Health Department. A presentation will be developed for Chippewa Valley health care providers collaboratively.

HEALTHCARE CONSIDERATIONS

PREVENTATIVE CARE

When encountering Amish patients in the health care setting, it is important to ask whether they are familiar with routine procedures such as blood pressure and heart rate checks. It isn't uncommon for an Amish adult to be unfamiliar with a typical health care setting, as it might be their first experience. Amish families rarely have routine baby visits and often choose not to completely immunize their children. In fact, none of the local Chippewa area Amish go in for baby checkups, instead, a public health nurse does new baby checkups in the home. Any genetic tests and immunizations chosen are also done at that time. It is common for Amish families to pursue blood, hearing, and heart screenings for newborns because of genetic and metabolic diseases that occur frequently among the Amish population as a result of founder effects and the genetically-closed community.

ALTERNATIVE CARE

Unwanted medical interventions, large medical bills for tests and procedures, as well as decision making, are among concerns that the Amish have about seeking health care. Rather than seeking medical attention, most often the Amish turn towards natural healing such as health foods, homeopathic remedies, reflexologists, chiropractors, and vitamins.

For this reason, it is important that when encountering an Amish patient, to specifically ask about supplements, herbals, homeopathic medicines, and cleanses in order to comprehensively assess drug interactions or identify contraindications. It is common for Amish families to seek medical care in Canada and Mexico where alternative therapies are offered and costs are reduced.

IMPACT OF RELIGION ON HEALTH

The Amish believe that God is the ultimate healer and are more willing to yield to the mysteries of divine providence and willingness to suffer than intervene when faced with a terminal illness. Pain, illness, disability and death are accepted as a part of life and most Amish decide to forgo extreme measures to save a life because death is accepted as God's will.

LANGUAGE

When communicating with the Amish, it is important to know that their preferred language is Pennsylvania Dutch; a language related to German. Children under 6 years of age may not speak English because it is typically not introduced until they enter school. Communication amongst the Amish is slower paced and not rushed, unlike the environment providers are used to. For this reason, it is important to consider responding thoughtfully and being patient in explaining procedures with the least amount of medical terminology possible, in other words, the most straightforward way. Sensitivity can be shown by leaving the room to allow for discussion among family members in their native language privately.

MATERNAL CHILD HEALTH

Although children are considered a gift from God, it is customary that no mention of pregnancy is made in the immediate or extended family. That being said, when a public health nurse visits a pregnant woman, they are not to speak about the pregnancy in the presence of young children, unless the child does not know English. The topic of pregnancy is viewed as a private matter that is sacred between the husband and the wife. Embarrassment could arise if brought up in a non-private environment. Providers are encouraged to respect this sensitive approach to pregnancy.



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"Amish alert, Tennessee" by david Jones is licensed under CC BY 2.0

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

The Amish words for both community and congregation are the same: *Gmee*. As a result, the dense and closed network represented by the congregation is an important part of Amish society and culture. Engaging with regular "kin-work", the Amish maintain those dense social networks through visiting and work-groups with members of their congregation as well as their extended family members. A core tenet of Amish faith is the submission of the individual to the group. As a result, decision-making and other cultural considerations are largely decided on by consensus.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

When considering health care, everything is filtered through the lens of expense. Most Amish do not have health insurance and pay all expenses out of pocket in cash, often striking deals with local hospitals by avoiding insurance claims. For some children with genetic diseases, who are not yet members of the church, the families sometimes choose Badger Care, but this is not shared openly, nor encouraged within the group. Donations for mutual aid are collected in each congregation, though large-scale donation efforts such as dinners and sales open to the public are sometimes an option when facing larger medical bills.

FUTURE PROJECT PLANS

This project will continue to work collaboratively with the Eau Claire City-County Health Department on the development of educational materials of interest to the Amish in the local Augusta and/or Mondovi settlements. Materials that highlight resources for the Amish settlements will be shared with the Amish.

In future, the Departments of Languages [AND] Nursing at UW-Eau Claire [AND] the Eau Claire City-County Health Department may continue to develop a cultural care guide for healthcare professionals across the state for use when caring for the Old Order Amish.

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