

## Module 22 – End of Life Care

### Handout #6

# *Nurse Aide: Respecting Patient & Family Cultural Beliefs*

The word "culture" refers to patterns of behaviors, including norms, traditions, and values that affect the thinking and behavior of members of groups. Cultural competence describes the ability to effectively interact with people belonging to diverse cultures. Cultural competence focuses on patient-centered care where the nurse aide strives to see each patient as a unique person. Care is tailored to each patient and family. Clear communication is the best way to learn about the culture of your patient and the family.

#### **A FEW THINGS TO REMEMBER:**

- If you are unsure about something, simply ask. Most people of unfamiliar cultures will be eager to educate anyone who is willing to listen and understand their cultural differences.
- When you meet a new patient and family, ask if there are any customs or beliefs you should know to help you in caring for your patient; do not assume that the customs and beliefs of your patient are the same as your customs and beliefs
- Good communication is essential to building trust; however, a language barrier can make communication between you and the patient and family difficult; ask your agency if a translator is available; when using a translator, look at the patient and family and speak to them as if no language barrier existed; do not look at the translator when speaking; the translator will relay the information to the patient and then their response back to you; a family member should not serve as the interpreter; it could be embarrassing or upsetting to translate personal information
- If a translator is unavailable, ask your agency for translation technology; while it may not be 100% accurate, it can help you better understand your patients and your patients better understand you; there are apps for cell phones and devices devoted to translation available; if a translator or a device unavailable, use pictures or hand gestures to communicate when necessary; remember to be patient; a language barrier is frustrating to both you and the patient and family.
- Learn to listen without planning your answer at the same time; it's important that patients feel heard and validated, particularly when they are in a vulnerable position; if you are thinking about your answer while the patient or family is speaking, you are not listening.
- A person who belongs to a cultural group may not follow that culture's usual practices and beliefs; always ask about the individual's beliefs, practices, and preferences; never assume that a group of people who have similar physical characteristics they are alike in their beliefs.
- Different cultures have different ways of making health care decisions; For example, if one person in a family makes all the health care decisions for family members,

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which is different from your beliefs, refrain from saying that your beliefs are different from the family's beliefs; use this opportunity to learn the customs and values of another culture.

- The use of touch is different among diverse cultures; for example, some cultures do not allow women to touch men; always ask before giving hug or holding a patient's hand.
- Some cultures have specific practices and rituals for end-of-life care and for expressing grief; it is important to respect and honor those practices; one cultural practice may be to leave the deceased's mouth and eyes open; in another culture, family members prefer to wash the body after death and be present to chant, pray, and use incense; one culture requires that family members prepare the body, and persons not of that religion should not touch it; burial takes place within 24 hours in another religion;
- The best time to learn about cultural practices and rituals for end-of-life care and grieving is prior to a patient's death; ask the family about any practices specific to their beliefs; check with your agency for materials that explain practices specific to different cultures.