

# INTERVIEW OF AN OLDER FAMILY MEMBER



Healthcare is a universal model, which is practiced by every cultural group. However, different cultures vary in the way they approach an ailment, and how the care is given. This is because culture is a predominant factor that shapes behavior, values, and beliefs, which also influence an individual's health and a response to an illness. With the above in mind, I have sought the audience with my uncle, whom I believe to be culturally conscious, to share the insight on my cultural beliefs in healthcare management.

In order to get a good start, I have begun by asking my uncle, what measures they take in order to make sure they never fall ill. My uncle has responded by saying that the most common belief about maintaining health is eating well, getting enough sleep, regular exercise, and keeping cleanliness. This enables a man to maintain strength and avoid body weakness. In our tradition, food is categorized depending on the physical characteristics, i.e. hot, acid, cold, heavy or cold, which must be balanced for an individual to maintain good health. However, my uncle tells me that this is in their days that our culture has not allowed the consumption of curdled dairy products such as yogurt, cottage cheese, and runny eggs yolks since they have stayed and; therefore, unhealthy. On the other hand, he tells me that the sign of a healthy individual includes the clear and healthy completion, normal body weight with a fair amount of body fat, and not experiencing any significant pain (Desrosiers & Fleurose, 2002).

Pregnancy is not a health condition in our culture, and most of the time, pregnant women engage in work. To us, pregnancy is a normal bodily function, and; therefore, women in our culture do not find it necessary to seek prenatal care, unless in extreme conditions. In order to maintain their health, pregnant women are encouraged to eat vegetables and red fruits to improve the development of the fetus' blood, as well as to avoid the spicy food since this may poison a baby. During labor, the father's presence is not necessary. Women are kept warm, clean and must get enough rest after they have delivered a child. They wear a band round their waist to prevent Gaz (Albertini & Barsky, 2003).

## Causes of illness

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My uncle also has told me that our community is very superstitious. For these reasons, illness is not an exception. People believe that most ailments are supernaturally induced. Supernatural refers to the belief that there is a greater force, which seems to violate and control the world, as well as the wellbeing of people (Albertini & Barsky, 2003). He has continued telling me that, in our culture, supernaturally induced illnesses are perceived to appear from several sources, which are: a strained relationship with God; spells from evil spirits; or offended Iwa. In order to understand what each of the supernatural beliefs entails, I have asked him to clarify the supernatural causes. He has said that, "a strained relationship with God" is a belief that a person's body may fall ill if his or her relationship with God has declined. For these reasons, God inflicts pain and suffrage to people who do not believe in him for them to repent and worship him (Cook Ross Inc., 2010).

Secondly, he has said that a significant number of people in my community believe that an illness can be caused by a curse. For instance, a jealous neighbor can place the curse upon an individual with the intention of disabling him or her. Lastly, he spoke about offended lwa. Lwa are the neglected individuals in the society; and for these reasons, they can induce illness and suffrage as a means of retaliation (Cook Ross Inc., 2010). He has given me an example, when he was young; there was a middle aged man. That man used to wander in the streets dressed in bizarre outfits; he was talking out loudly to himself while cursing at his enemies. According to my uncle, the man used to be a perfectly normal young man, a father and a husband. However, his lover did not feel content with the decision of the man. He did not want to marry a second wife. For this reason, the woman inflicted the curse on him making him go wild. The spell he says is called wanga, which is a collection of ingredients collected in a bottle or a pouch believed to possess magical powers (Albertini & Barsky, 2003).

On the other hand, my community also believes in natural causes of illness, which is perceived not to be supernaturally induced. My uncle explains this by saying that for the illness to be perceived as naturally induced; its causes must be seen in the natural world. For this reason, they result from such environmental factors as air, food, heat or gas. Some of the illnesses associated with a natural cause include obesity, fever, cold, or headache (Spector, 2012). Additionally, these illnesses are short-term and occur frequently among individuals (Cook Ross Inc., 2010). My uncle has given me an example of a gaz (gas) induced ailment. He tells me that gaz affects a head, a stomach, a back, and legs. It is believed to enter the head through the ears and other parts through a mouth to the stomach where it is spread to other parts of the body. In the stomach, gas causes the stomach pain while being in the head, it is called van nan tet.

It means “gas in one ear,” and is believed to cause headache. On the other hand, Gaz causes pain while moving from one part of the body to another. For example, when moving from the stomach to legs it causes rheumatism; and when moving to the back, it causes the back pain. Meanwhile moving to the shoulder it causes the shoulder pain. Also, a common belief in my community is that, after childbirth, women are likely to develop gaz (Albertini & Barsky, 2003).

## Healing practices

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Since ailments in my community are perceived to be caused by a different factor, my uncle tells me that different forms of illnesses have different approaches for healing them (Spector, 2012). However, the majority of individuals in my community manage their symptoms or illnesses by consulting their family members, spiritual leaders, traditional herbalists, or a health care provider, finally (Cook Ross Inc., 2010).

My uncle tells me that the first resources for managing any form of illness are by getting advice from the immediate family members (Spector, 2012). However, different treatments may be used depending on whether the illness is naturally or supernaturally induced. For instance, my uncle illustrates that both natural and spiritual treatments are used when a person experiences Seizisman (Cook Ross Inc., 2010). Family members of the affected individuals help them to sit quietly. They apply a cold press on the patient's forehead. Additionally, they are administering a concoction made from the herbal medicine of tea, water, or rum mixed with black coffee. However, when the condition persists, the patient is advised to seek the treatment from a spiritual healer such as a Haungan (Albertini &

Barsky, 2003).

Spiritual healing is the secondary mode of symptoms management and spiritual care. Such leaders include a priest or a clergyman (Desrosiers & Fleurose, 2002). For instance, my uncle tells me that the supernatural induced illness such as the offended lwa is treated by Voodoo ceremonies. In regards to lwa, a Houngan is called to offer a healing service. In addition, illnesses caused by supernatural factors are treated by the individual's prayers and religious incantations (Cook Ross Inc., 2010). As my uncle explains this, I have asked him if he believes in lwa. He tells me that the tradition is passed by the time. However, he confirms that when he faces a rather unusual illness, he seeks the religious intersection or calls his church member to pray for him. He also says that this method is used when the illness is believed to have come from a strained relationship with God. Under these circumstances, the prayer helps repair and strengthen the individual's relationship with God (Spector, 2012).

Finally, my uncle affirms that the use of herbs is a common practice among traditional healers in my culture. This approach is only used when treating some naturally induced ailments or symptoms. For example, my uncle tells me that they used the root sarsaparilla as a way of cleaning blood, kidney, liver, spleen or bowel, and also as a preventive measure for ailments (Desrosiers & Fleurose, 2002). Another common herb used in my culture is senna, which functions as a laxative herb and cures indigestion. In addition to using particular herbs for curing the ailment, a patient can choose to be attended to by a medsen fey or a leaf doctor (Prince, 2010). The medsen fey is a traditional medical expert who specializes in the use of leafs and other plants to manage and cure ailments. On the other hand, traditional doctors recommend their patients to eat well and maintain a healthy diet. For example, my culture believes that the tea

made from garlic, mint, cloves, plantain and corn is capable of dismissing gaz (Prince, 2005). Additionally, to prevent gas from entering into the body, one must not eat leftovers especially beans (Desrosiers & Fleurose, 2002).

My culture believes in the life after death. Additionally, we have a belief that zombies exist. When it is clear that death is forthcoming to an individual, he prefers to die at home rather than in the hospital. Spiritual leaders visit a dying person to pray with them and give support to the family. After death, we conduct a Veye, Drenie Priye whereby friends and family members of the diseased one gather to grieve, and conduct prayer services. This facilitates the transition of the soul to the next world. During a funeral ceremony, mourners wear white; and since we believe in the life after death, the cremation is not necessary (Albertini & Barsky, 2003).

In conclusion, different cultures vary in the way they approach an illness and how care is given. My culture is not an exception. Healthcare and healthcare management are the significant parts of our traditions. As indicated above, we believe in the natural and supernatural causes of illness. For this reason, we have various means of approaching and managing ailments depending on this. For instance, the family is a primary source of consulting whenever individuals are ailing, after which we address other means of intervention such as prayers or use of herbs.