Haitian Healthcare Practices

Jennell Bethea

Winona State University

Author Note

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Haiti is a country that is located on the island of Hispaniola, nestled between Cuba and Puerto Rico. This country of roughly 9.7 million inhabitants is filled with diverse people with a unique heritage. This paper will take a further look into Haitian heritage and how their culture influences healthcare practices, comparing and contrasting healthcare practices in Haitian culture to that of Cuban and European American culture, and lastly, telling why cultural competence of Haitian healthcare practices is important.

Many Haitians believe illness is a punishment brought on either by the Lord or by supernatural powers (Purnell, 2013, p. 283, 284). Another cause of illness is believed to come from disturbances in hot (cho) and cold (fret) equilibriums within the body. Illnesses that are brought on by supernatural spirits can be counteracted with the help of a voudou priest or hougan. This folk practice according to Purnell, is a “communication by trace between the believer and ancestors, saints, or animistic deities (p.283). Haitians have three phrases that describe their illness; moin malad (I am sick), moin malad anpil (I am very sick), and moin pap refe (I am dying) (Purnell, 2013, p. 284). Due to the cultural belief that illness is a punishment and the action for first seeking the help of a voudou priest, there may be a delay in seeking the care of a physician.

Cuba is approximately 400 miles away from Haiti. These two countries share many of the same ideas when it comes to healthcare beliefs. Both of these countries have a “fatalistic” view of illness and believe in a higher power ultimately choosing their fate. As Haitians believe in seeking the help of a voudou priest or hougan, Cubans believe in consulting the help of a santero. In contrast, European Americans (“Americans”) have very different beliefs about healthcare
practices. In Haitian beliefs illness is a punishment, while many Americans believe that they are responsible for their own healthcare and value preventative treatments. However, these two seemingly different cultural approaches to healthcare do share self-medicating behaviors.

It is vitally important for individuals in healthcare to have a diverse knowledge and acceptance of the unique healthcare views based on the heritage and beliefs. The Haitian population living in the United States is approximately 830,000 to 1.5 million people, most residing in Florida, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut (Purnell, 2013, p. 269). According to Schwartz, Bernal, Smith, and Nicolas (2014), “Haitians comprise the largest subgroup of Caribbean Americans in this country” (Background section, para 1). Cultural competence is important for my future healthcare career, in that the knowledge of Haitian beliefs and practices will help decrease healthcare disparities for new or acclimating Haitian immigrants.

In conclusion, the diverse culture of Haiti has many beliefs and practices that are unique to its people. Some of these beliefs influence their healthcare practices. This culture’s healthcare practices can be compared and contrasted to that of other heritages; such as the cultural practices of Cubans and European Americans. Cultural competence is vitally important for those in the healthcare field, so that healthcare disparities can be minimized.
References
