Section 5: Literature Overview

LITERATURE REVIEW AND BEST PRACTICES

Although many medical toolkits exist in print and online, this is the first of its kind focused on enhancing cultural and linguistic communication between Maya immigrants to the United States and their health care providers. By studying the history of the Maya people and their cultural practices and beliefs, we were able to customize the resources provided in this toolkit to their specific needs. Literature on cultural competency and best practices in trans-cultural medicine was used to ground our research and products in the field in which they will be applied. We also looked to a variety of existing toolkits for guidance on the structure and content needed to make this toolkit a successful, useable tool for medical providers.

MAYA HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES

Though the Maya have been immigrating to the United States for many years, there is a dearth of information regarding their health practices in the country. In her study of Indiantown, Florida, during the 1980s, Maria Miralles examined the barriers to health care that many Maya immigrants faced at that time. In 2002, Cecile Menjivar analyzed how Guatemalan women in Los Angeles, California utilized complex social networks to access health information and traditional treatments because they experienced barriers to receiving biomedical care. Examining care barriers and ways to overcome these obstacles was then taken up by Colleen Supanich in 2009, who specifically examined Guatemalan Maya women seeking prenatal care in Florida. Language, cost, and culture were recurring barriers in all of these studies. Making simple changes in modes of communication can greatly enhance the quality of care that Maya immigrants receive. Several other studies clearly show that Maya immigrants experience a higher standard of health in the United States if they receive adequate nutrition and information about healthy practices.
For more information on Maya health in the United States, see:


MAYA HEALTH IN GUATEMALA

Understanding the health care system in Guatemala and traditional Maya health practices is vital to developing culturally appropriate tools for the Maya in the U.S. Historically, the Maya do not separate their beliefs about health and spirituality; illness can be caused by natural or supernatural causes. However, in recent years, the Guatemalan government and non-profit organizations have been trying to bring biomedical care to more remote areas of the country. This has led some Maya traditions to blend with Western medicine, resulting in a variety of health care beliefs being adopted in different areas, a concept referred to as medical pluralism.

For more information on Maya health in Guatemala, see:


This collection of essays addresses a variety of health care concerns that are currently being faced in Guatemala. Examining the developing health care system and the way that it interacts with the traditional Maya health system is pertinent to understanding how Maya traditions intersect with biomedical practices in the U.S.


MENTAL HEALTH

For more information on Mental Health for immigrant communities, see:


BEST PRACTICES

Studies show that when working with indigenous populations and refugee communities, clinicians can provide better quality care by considering the cultural perspective of their patients. Understanding a patient’s history and cultural traditions can help identify potential problems, ease the patient’s anxieties, and enhance quality of care.

For more information on the best practice models used to develop this toolkit, see:


CULTURAL CONGRUENCY

The concept of cultural congruency or cultural competency is at the heart of this toolkit. Through knowledge of diverse cultural conventions that might affect health care beliefs, practices, and understandings, medical providers can provide the best quality care to their patients.

For more information on cultural congruency, see the following:


TOOLKIT MODELS

The following toolkits and websites provide examples of what we are striving for in creating this Maya Toolkit for Medical Providers. We looked to these sites for inspiration, information, and guidance. Many offer their own tools for alternate populations or resources that health care providers may find useful in their own research and practice.

- **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)**
  - http://www.ahrq.gov

- **Alta Language**

- **Brycs**
  - http://www.brycs.org

- **Community-Based Family Planning Toolkit**
  - http://www.k4health.org/toolkits/communitybasedfp

- **Healthy Roads Media**

- **Medline Plus**

- **Migrant Clinicians Network - Diabetes Online Toolkit**
  - http://www.migrantclinician.org/clinical_topics/mcn-diabetes-online-toolkit.html

- **Migrant Health Promotion Site**

- **National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

- **Office of Minority Health**

- **Patient Provider Communication**
  - http://www.patientprovidercommunication.org/

- **Think Cultural Health**
  - http://www.thinkculturalhealth.org/