Chinese Culture & End of Life Care

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Chinese Aging Beliefs

- Children are taught to respect the elderly
- Believe in Filial piety or Hsiao
  - Children must have upmost respect for parents & grandparents
  - Respect should increase as parents age
  - It is child’s duty to care for elderly parents
- Goal is for a long life
- Prefer not to discuss death and dying
  - Feel it is bad luck
  - Believe it will cause death or illness
- (Hsu, O’connor, & Lee, 2009)
Aging Beliefs Continued

- Health decisions are made by family
  - Not individual
- Doctor’s opinion is valued highly
- Use “Traditional Chinese Medicine” (TCM) to treat illnesses
  - Herbs
  - Acupuncture
  - Coining and pinching
    - Type of massage
  - Hot or cold foods
- (National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 2009)
Chinese Dying Beliefs

- Prefer to die at home
  - Surrounded by family and loved ones
  - Feel this helps strengthen bonds with ancestors
    - Believe ancestors control health, wellbeing, and misfortune
- Placed in main hall of home
  - Holiest place of house
  - Where ancestors are worshipped
- Many still die in hospitals
- (Hsu, O’connor, & Lee, 2009)
Dying Beliefs Continued

- Focus on “nirvana”
  - Provided a clean, quiet environment
  - Goal is peace at end of life
  - End of life care is focused on psychological needs
  - Family may chant during final moments
  - (Hsu, O'connor, & Lee, 2009)

- Do not discuss end of life preferences (DNR, DNI)
  - Believe it is disrespectful and taboo
  - (National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 2009)
Chinese Death Practices

- Traditionally
  - Eldest son places silk in deceased’s nostril
  - Waves coat from rooftop calling deceased’s name
    - Gives soul a chance to return
    - Wait three days for return
- Do not agree with autopsies
  - Families usually get very upset
  - Feel the deceased is being mutilated
  - Coroners try to use CT scans instead of autopsies
  - After autopsy or investigation, families are able to resume their rituals
- (Chan & Chow, 2005)
Death Practices

- Body of deceased is bathed and dressed by family
  - On third day after death
  - Typically a person of the same gender as deceased
  - Believe this allows for a good reincarnation
  - Helps family accept death
    - Often if family does not see deceased they do not believe they are really dead
- Body placed in coffin or cremated on fourth day
- (Chan & Chow, 2005)
Death Practices

- Wake or viewing the day before funeral
- Funerals held at a funeral parlor
  - May last $\frac{1}{2}$ day to 7 days
- Traditionally, body is buried
  - Cremation is also being used
    - Due to lack of land and burial space
- (Chan & Chow, 2005)
Funeral Services

- Attack on hell
  - Nine pieces of clay are destroyed to represent the 9 gates of hell
  - Helps prevent loved one from going to hell
- Untying of the knots
  - Performed by separating 49 coins from 49 buttons
  - Helps the deceased disengage from this world
- Crossing the bridge
  - Eldest son carries a tablet and banner
  - Crosses three bridges
  - Symbolizes transition to heaven

(Chan & Chow, 2005)
Chinese Grieving Practices

- Traditionally
  - Widows grieve for life
    - Are not supposed to remarry
  - Children grieve for three years
    - Sons cannot cut hair during this period
- (Chan & Chow, 2005)
Grieving Practices

- **Modernly**
  - Grieving lasts 49 days
  - Memorials held every seven days after death
    - Every seven days part of the soul leaves the body
    - Prayer is essential to help deceased achieve forgiveness and purification
  - Family meets at grave twice a year
    - Have a meal together at grave to honor loved one

- (Chan & Chow, 2005)
References

