FILIPINO-AMERICANS

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Filipino-American Culture

I. Description of Culture

A. Demographics
   - There are 1,159 Filipinos in Maine (2000).
   - There are 1,850,314 Filipinos in the United States (2000).
   - Filipinos are one of the fastest growing minorities in the U.S.
   - In 2003, over 45,000 Filipinos immigrated to the U.S. and became legal residents.
   - One sixth of the total immigrants to the U.S. are Filipinos.
   - One million of the seven million foreign-born residents in the U.S. are from the Philippines.

B. Brief History
   - 7,107 islands make up the Philippines.
   - Spain ruled the Philippines from 1560-1898.
   - The United States ruled the Philippines from 1898-1946, when the Philippines were granted full independence.
   - There are several cultural influences from Malay, China, Papua, India, Polynesia, Japan, and America.
   - Migration: most of the immigrants to the U.S. prior to WWII were men. Since 1960, the number of female immigrants has increased, especially healthcare professionals.
   - Since the 1970’s, the Philippines have supplied over 35,000 nurses to the United States, the most of any other foreign country.

C. Foods
   - Cuisine has Chinese, Malay, Spanish, and Mexican influences.
   - Filipino foods are often given Spanish names.
   - Fish, oyster, squid, pork, chicken are the preferred meats. Not much beef is eaten in the Philippines.
   - Barbecued sticks of meat or seafood are popular snacks.
   - Standard dishes are served with jasmine or sticky rice.
   - Meat and vegetables are cooked with vinegar and garlic.
   - Other favorites include:
     - A variety of soups
     - Local fruits in syrup
     - Flan (custard)
- Lumpia (eggrolls)
- Pancit (noodles mixed with vegetables and meat)
- Siomai (dumplings)
- Lechon (spit-roasted pig)

- Common spices are saffron and paprika.
- Filipino Americans also eat American foods such as burgers, fried chicken, steaks, sandwiches, and salads.

D. Dress

- The national costume is the *barong tagalog* for a man, which is a loose, heavily-embroidered shirt worn over the trousers. It has a closed collar with short sleeves for day wear or long, cuffed sleeves for formal occasions.
- Female folk dancers wear bright and colorful dresses.
- Many garments are handmade and some have fine detailing.
- Jeans and t-shirts are common among the younger Filipinos.
- In the United States, Filipinos wear typical American clothing.

E. Language/ Communication/ Ethnic Groups

- There are 120 ethnic groups, including Warays, Tagalogs, Cebuanos, Bicolans, or Ilocanos.
- The Philippines has been the world’s second-largest English-speaking nation.
- The national language was Filipino (based on Tagalog) since 1946.
- The national language was changed in 1973 to Pilipino (also based on Tagalog and other Philippine languages).
- There are about 80 dialects within the Philippines.
- The language has been influenced by Sanskrit, Arabic, Chinese, English, and Spanish.
- English is spoken throughout the Philippines, especially for commerce and politics.
- Written communication is typically in English, while oral communication is often in Taglish (a combination of Tagalog and English).
- Spanish is not commonly spoken today in the Philippines. However, Tagalog includes several thousand Spanish words.
- The majority of Filipino names are Spanish based, due to Spanish colonizing and Christianizing in the Philippines.
- Standards of beauty are Spanish based: lighter skin is considered beautiful.
- Filipino values include the concepts of:
  - Pakikisama: supporting others despite your own desires
  - Utang ng loob: reciprocation. One is considered to be in debt until one pays back gifts and favors.
  - Hiya: shame. One must help others and reciprocate, or one will experience shame.
  - Amor Proprio: Following these principles will raise one’s self esteem.
F. Arts

- Traditional theatre has largely been replaced by Western entertainment.
- Folk dancing in full costume is still performed.
- A love of music includes composing songs, playing guitar, singing love songs (*kundimans*) and singing karaoke.

G. Holidays

- Christmas (celebrated for nine days before Christmas by attending novena Masses. This tradition has been altered since coming to the U.S.). Traditions include hanging the star lantern (*parol*) in the front window, displaying the nativity scene, and offering a basket of fruit and the national flower.
- Easter.
- All Saints Day (Nov. 1st). This is a day to celebrate ancestors. Families go to the cemetery to clean and decorate the gravesite of ancestors. Families bring food for a picnic and make a plate for the deceased so they may come back and join in the meal. Sometimes the families dig up the bones of the ancestors to take photographs with them.
- People Power Day (February 25th). This is a celebration of non-violent demonstration, commemorating when the people of the Philippines forced their president to step down from power by protesting.
- National Heroes Day (August 31st). Various national heroes are honored.
- Labor Day (May 1st)
- The Feast of San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist)
- New Year’s Day (celebrated with fireworks)
- Black Nazarene Procession (a life-sized statue of Jesus is carried through the streets).
- *Ati-Atihan* (Filipino version of Mardi Gras) celebrated the third week in January
- Good Friday
- *Flores de Mayo* (in honor of the Virgin Mary)
- Independence Day (June 12th)
- Birthdays, baptisms, and weddings are often elaborate affairs.
- Many other festivals are celebrated in different regions of the Philippines.

H. Religions and Beliefs

- The Philippines is the only Christian country in Asia.
- 92% are Christian (85% Catholic and 7% Protestant).
- 5% are Muslim.
- Catholicism influences political, social, and health beliefs.
- Spanish missionaries, especially the Jesuits, did not condemn the Filipinos’ offering of sacrifices and prayers to harvest spirits. Instead they substituted patron saints of fishermen and farmers, forming a Filipino Catholicism known as “folk Christianity” (Bulatao).
Christian Missionaries are still active in the Philippines.
Novenas and Catholic Charismatic movements are still popular with Filipino-Americans.
Minority religions include Islam, Church of Christ, Jehovah’s Witness, Baptist, Mormon, Buddhism, Taoism, the Philippine Independent Church, and indigenous animism.

I. Education

- The school system in the Philippines is based on the American system, but children receive their diploma at age 16.
- More than 70% of Filipino immigrants to the United States have more than a high school education.
- More women have collegiate and graduate degrees than men. However females have a lower average income than men.
- Education is valued and the Philippines nation is considered one of the most schooled countries in Asia.
- Their literacy rate is 95%; only 87% are of functional literacy.

II. Family, Relationships, and Roles

- Values are based on Christian and Asian cultures.
- Originally a patriarchal society under Spanish rule, Filipino men and women are now considered equals.
- The father is head of the household, but the mother has a high position and often serves as family treasurer and housekeeper.
- Extended family lives together.
- Closely knit families are highly valued.
- Elders are treated with respect and are cared for at home as they age.
- Grandparents usually tend to the children while both parents work.
- Children are much loved and given a great deal of freedom while they are young.
- When children get old enough they are expected to help out the family by working.
- At about age 13, children take on more responsibilities at home.
- Coming-out parties are still held for young debutants.
- It is traditional for the girl to ask her father permission before dating a young man.
- Filipinos tend to marry young, after a courtship process.
- Dowry refers to gifts given to the bride by the groom’s family.
- Traditionally, the bridegroom assumed all the responsibility for the wedding dress and celebration, but now expenses are apt to be shared.
- The wife’s married name is added to her maiden name and her children have her maiden name as their middle name.
- Individuals are thought of as family, whether it is by blood, marriage, or close friendship.
High value is placed on inter-dependence of family members.
The group is put ahead of the individual.
Family loyalty engenders family support.
Families try to avoid disagreements and conflict.
Third parties are often used as intermediaries.
Open displays of anger or aggression are discouraged.
Filipinos regard confrontation and directness as being rude.
They respect the feelings of others, even strangers.
They value basic honesty and good humor.
They do not believe in taking advantage of others.

III. Concept of Work/Play/Time

Filipinos value hard work.
Philippine nurses are well known for their quality of care and professionalism.
They have the advantage of already speaking English.
Favorite leisure activities include:
   o Doing shopping and going to markets
   o Playing basketball, sipa (similar to volleyball), piko (hopscotch),
     tennis, and golf
   o Listening to music
   o Enjoying internet café/chat rooms, video games, and movies.
Women play Chinese mah jongg, do cross-stitching, and combine socializing with work.
Women don’t usually drink alcohol.
Men drink alcohol as early as high school.
Men enjoy playing cards, watching sporting events, going fishing, hanging out, playing guitar, gambling, and racing.

IV. Health/Healthcare Considerations

A. Health

   Filipino elders have a higher incidence of diabetes and coronary heart disease than whites
   Filipino children are less likely than non-Hispanic white children to miss school due to injury or illness, to have learning disabilities or be on prescription medicine for over three months.
   Filipinos, like other Asian groups, are considered at risk of somatization due to their suppression of emotions.
   They may seek healthcare services for physical symptoms that may be related to stress

B. Healthcare
An outreach effort is needed to help Filipinos access and navigate the American medical establishment, especially regarding primary and preventive care.

Even though Filipinos have an understanding of the English language and are able to speak English to some degree, they may not understand medical terminology.

Professional or religious counseling is rarely sought; Filipinos are hesitant to discuss personal issues.

C. Traditional healing and beliefs

- In the Philippines, traditional healers address spirituality in their treatment, sometimes using prayer, holy oil, massage, and acupuncture.
- Herbal remedies and medicinal teas are used for healing.
- A traditional Filipino cultural belief is that the cause of illness is due to spiritual reasons, such as God, witchcraft, and spirits.
- Sicknesses are part of God’s plan for a person (his or her destiny).
- Some Filipinos may avoid medical treatment, leaving things up to God.
- Filipinos cope through prayer, hope, faith, suffering silently, and avoiding complaining.
- Accepting pain is a chance to grow spiritually and atone for past sins.
- Healthcare is viewed as a fix-all, but if there is a clash with Filipino traditional medicine, it may replace Western medicine.
- Clients may make offers of gifts or food in observance of utang ng loob.

D. Values

- Patients may avoid pain medication due to fear of becoming addicted, fear of losing control, or fear of being a nuisance. Pain needs to be assessed by watching body language.
- Filipinos value modesty, privacy, and confidentiality.
- They tend not to ask questions, being very polite.
- They are not comfortable expressing emotions in public, since they do not want to lose face. Support groups and group therapy may not be helpful.

E. Death

- Traditional Filipinos may avoid living wills and preparing for death, as they do not want to tempt fate.
- Assisted suicide is not permitted, but withholding life support and pain management is allowed.
Family members may want to take over care of the patient either in the hospital or at home.

A death ritual involves the Novena (saying prayers every night for nine days after a death). Family members take turns watching over the body. On the ninth night, family and friends hold a feast (atang) in which they eat favorite foods of the deceased. They also set a place at the table for the deceased.

Visiting hours should be extended to allow the family to mourn.

F. Family

Family-centered treatment would be most effective when dealing with Filipino patients.

Do not directly criticize the individual or family.

Be aware of possible “cultural conflict” among different family generations due to varying degrees of acculturation.

Family should be included in healthcare decisions.

They may not want the patient to know his or her prognosis.

Patients need family members (even extended family) present at all times during their illness. Be prepared for a “family reunion”.

Never address an older Filipino by his or her first name.

Even when addressing older siblings, Filipinos use titles of respect rather than first names or nicknames.

V. Suggestions for healthcare practitioners

Include and respect family members.

Be flexible about rules regarding visiting hours, number of visitors, and immediate family. Provide extra chairs in the patient’s room.

Inquire whether herbal treatments are being used.

Be concerned about pain control.

Consider the patient’s religious beliefs and values.

Encourage healthcare access and help patients understand the American healthcare system and medical terminology.

Provide an interpreter and possibly a Catholic priest.

Be concerned about miscommunication if the patient and family revert to speaking in their own language.

Consider the effects of stress on illness.

Make provisions for privacy and modesty.

VI. Other Considerations

Because Filipinos have some understanding of the American language and culture, they don’t stay in large groups when they move to the United States.
- They may have less family support and fewer resources, which may increase their stress level.
- They may have issues with childcare, which was formerly performed by family.
References


