Using Spiritual Healing Practices as Part of Treatment

Presented by
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With gratitude to Venerable Rong Be and Pisey Sok, MFT for sharing their insights and knowledge
Learning Objectives

1. Learn about a method of working with an ethnic culture that is culturally aware and respectful. This methodology can be applied to other situations where cultural competency is needed.

2. To develop a critical approach on how to identify those key elements that help clients feel they are understood and respected which ties into their increased ability to recover.

3. To incorporate elements in the treatment plan that directly work to decrease social isolation and increase family acceptance.

4. Learn about the healing benefits of cultural spiritual practices and understand how they work.
Understanding Cambodian Culture & History

- Over the nearly 2,000 years of Cambodian history, religion has been a major source of cultural inspiration.
  - Over time, a unique Khmer belief system developed from the mixing of indigenous animistic beliefs and the Indian religions of Buddhism and Hinduism. It was also influenced by Chinese folk religion and ancestor veneration.
  - Approximately 90% of Cambodians including those in Long Beach practice Theravada Buddhism.
  - Approximately 14-20% of younger Cambodians join Christian or Mormon churches.
An Integrated Approach towards Healing

PACS was funded by the Dept of Mental Health to provide:

- Medical, behavioral and substance abuse services to Cambodians in Los Angeles County.
- The contract allocated funds towards the use of traditional healing practices as a form of treatment.
- INC partners
  - The Children’s Clinic
  - Asian American Drug Abuse Prevention
  - Grassroot agencies in the community
The Importance of Spirituality

Spirituality is a source of:

- Inspiration & Hope
- Purpose & Meaning
- Healing

Spirituality is a universal human experience—something that touches us all.
Aspects of Spiritual and Compassionate Care

- Compassionate presence—i.e., being fully present, attentive and supportive in all of our clients’ suffering: physical, emotional, and spiritual.
- Listening to patients' fears, hopes, pain, and dreams
- Obtaining a spiritual history.
- Being attentive to all dimensions of patients: body, mind, and spirit.
- Incorporating spiritual practices as appropriate.
- Involving spiritual leaders and healers as members of the interdisciplinary treatment team.
Clients’ Perspective on Mental Illness and Recovery

**Mental Illness**
- Symptoms were caused by their situation so they felt that if those problems were resolved such as finding a job or home, the mental illness would go away.
- Physical aches and pains, headaches, sad feelings, etc. are a sign of their state of mind.
- Unbalanced mind and body due to stress.
- Symptoms caused by negative experiences.
- Current pain and suffering are a result of bad karma

**Recovery**
- To feel better like they did before they got “sick”
- Not to worry about the messages voices are telling them.
- To be able to sleep better.
- To have happiness and peace in their lives meant that their children were also well and happy.
- To know that their lives have meaning and to find a way to pass their knowledge on to their children.

- To know someone has **listened**.
- To be treated in a **respectful** way.
- To know how to navigate.
- To learn English.
- To start their own business if they could get some financing.
- Many clients report that when they are engaged in an activity (counseling, support group, Blessing Ceremony), they feel better and aches and pains disappear during that time of activity.
Implementing Spiritual Healing Practices

**Themes:**
- Pain and suffering attributed to bad karma
- Belief in higher power and something bigger than themselves
- Value helping and doing good to others
- Good actions can lead to good karma
- Respect, understanding and culture are highly valued

**Outcome:**
Incorporate spiritual healing practices to address barriers to recovery and provide multiple platforms and opportunities for healing.
Sampeah - The Cambodian Greeting

Cambodian Greeting

Sampeah is an important part of the Khmer culture. It is a greeting or goodbye; it is used to say thank you or to apologize. Presenting Sampeah is a sign of respect and politeness and it is considered impolite not to return Sampeah. The palms of the hands are placed together like a lotus flower.

Five versions

Fifth Sampeah: When one prays to the Buddha or sacred statues, both palms are together at the forehead level.

Fourth Sampeah: When one greets the king or monks, both palms are together at the eyebrow level.

Third Sampeah: When one greets one’s parents, grandparents or teacher, both palms are together at the nose level.

Second Sampeah: When one greets their boss, an older person or higher ranking people, both palms are at the mouth level.

First Sampeah: When one greets friends who are the same age, both
Spiritual Healing Practices to Address Trauma

Since effects of trauma can be physical, healing starts with mind-body-spirit interventions.

Spiritual Practices:
- Blessing Ceremony
- Cooking Classes & Blessing Offer
- Mindful Gardening
- Yoga
- Mindfulness Meditation Workshops
- Empowerment Support Groups
- Traditional Massages and Acupuncture
- Tai Chi

Elements in mind-body-spirit interventions:
- Relaxation and regulated breathing
- Self-observation of mental activity
- Attentional focused training on the present moment
- Components centering on activity, mindfulness and posture
- Good deed and actions to self and others
The Role of Buddhist Monks

- Buddhist monks traditionally perform a number of functions in Cambodian life.
- As the religious leaders, they participate in all the life-cycle ceremonies from birth to death such as marriage, naming of infants, rites of passage, etc.
- Monks do not lead the ceremonies. This role is done by the “achar” (ajah) or master of ceremonies.

Functions

- Practice Buddha’s Dhamma – the state and laws of nature as taught by Buddha on human suffering.
- Say prayers of blessing.
- Seen as healers but traditionally in the role of listening.
- The monks can teach understanding and acceptance of one’s karma and dharma. By coming to peace with oneself, there is healing.
- Might be skilled in astrology.
- Transmit Khmer culture and values. A monk’s way of life is a living model of meritorious behavior for Buddhists to follow.
- Their presence provides the laity with opportunities to gain merit.
- Education – for centuries, monks were the only literate people in rural communities. Until the 1970s, most literate Cambodian males were taught solely through the instruction of the sangha (monk).
The Blessing Ceremony
HOW DID THE BLESSING CEREMONY MEET THE NEEDS OF CLIENTS:

The first Blessing Ceremony was held on August 5, 2014 with about 40 people including 15 clients.

• The ceremony allows the sharing of divine good. It invites good energy so that it might be passed on to those present. Thus a sense of harmony and well being can be felt and taken in.

• Intergenerational conflicts can be addressed because the ceremony provides a space where the family can be re-balanced and each member knows their rightful place.
Cooking Class with food offering
On October 31, 2014, INC held its first cooking class as part of nutrition education. It was initially held at wats and monks were invited.

Location was expanded to parks and outdoor areas.

Older clients can teach family members and younger clients which places them in a respected role.

Bringing in the younger clients to learn Cambodian cooking – intergenerational communication.

Allows the clients and their families to perform a blessing by feeding the monks which is very important to them.

Continues the process of honoring the spiritual ties.

Reduces social isolation.

Family, friends, staff and members from the community were invited. This helped normalize the activity for the clients.
By offering the Blessing Ceremony & Cooking Class

- The clients’ wishes were acknowledged.
- They felt that PACS understood their culture.
- They were participating in a good deed or righteous action and this brought harmony.
- They felt that PACS respected their culture by “allowing” this as part of the treatment.
- For many of the Cambodian clients, they would not have been able to afford to put on a Blessing Ceremony. This added to their sense that they were fulfilling their duties as a Buddhist.
“Being blessed is not simply ending one’s own suffering rather it is to empower one to end the suffering of others.”

- Pisey Sok, MFT
Capturing Effectiveness

- DMH Surveys
- Pre & Post Surveys
As a result of the Non-traditional services I received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Baseline (n=16)</th>
<th>6 months (n=21)</th>
<th>12 months (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel less worried/anxious</td>
<td>% Agree</td>
<td>% Disagree</td>
<td>% Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less frustrated</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to focus better</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sleep better</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I eat better</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I eat better</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more physically active</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel less body pain</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel happier</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more relaxed</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more energy</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more socially active</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more self-confidence</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get along better with my family/friends</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more motivation to work</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my life is in more harmony/balanced</td>
<td>57.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more connected to my community</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am better able to do things that I want to do</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have met new people or made new friends</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My physical health has improved</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel more spiritually connected</td>
<td>73.7%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FY 16-17 PRE SURVEY Blessing Ceremony

Number of clients

scale 0-10 (0=negative, 10=positive)

- Please rate how you are feeling.
- Please rate how calm you are feeling. 0 is not calm. 10 is very calm.
- Please rate your ability to sleep.
- Please rate how hopeful you feel about the future.
- Please rate your appetite.
- Any comments or feedback you would like to share?
FY 17-18 PRE SURVEY COOKING CLASS

- Please rate how you are feeling.
- Please rate how happy you are feeling.
- Please rate your satisfaction with your family and friends.
- Please rate your appetite.
- Please rate how calm you are feeling. 0 is not calm. 10 is very calm.
- Please rate your ability to sleep.
- Please rate how hopeful you feel about the future.
- Any comments or feedback you would like to share?
The Happiness Scale comes from the first question on the pre- and post-surveys about the Blessing Ceremony.

Note: On the pre-survey, many Cambodians scored a “5.” We think it is because Cambodians do not express negative or sad feelings when directly asked. Our older clients felt that their lives are not that bad compared to what they suffered under the Khmer Rouge. In the post-survey, there were significant jumps to “10 - feeling very good.”
Empowerment Support Groups
Other non-traditional healing practices:

Tai Chi
Yoga
Mindfulness Meditation
Acupuncture
Massage
Mindfulness Gardening
Rewards from a spiritual point of view

• The ceremony and offering of food to monks have a deeper significance to the clients. It awakens in them the realization that they are paying back the past but also giving them an opportunity to create their future.

• Spirituality is a guiding force that help clients recover and find purpose and meaning in their lives.

• Understanding and adapting culturally sensitive practices result in positive outcomes, including improvements in patient care and well-being.
Context is the key that unlocks the gateway for us to draw upon the wisdom of the past to guide us in solving our problems in the present.
Thanks!

Integrated Network for Cambodians Pacific Asian Counseling Services

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“Spiritual Healing Practices”
A documentary by
Charlene Emory and Stephanie Kloebert

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