

# Vietnamese Culture: Influences and Implications for Health Care

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## Background

The origins of Vietnam can be traced back over 5,000 years. Originally a tribe living in "Giao Chi,"<sup>1</sup> Vietnam was divided into Cochin China (South Vietnam), Tonkin (North Vietnam), and Annam (Central Vietnam).<sup>2</sup> Vietnam's history is characterized by several dynasties and the geographic movement of imperial power throughout the North and South.<sup>3</sup> Influences from French and Chinese colonization resulted in a rich intermixing of cultures, though separately governed. However, after World War II the Japanese set up Vietnam as an autonomous state, leading to Annamese and Tonkinese nationalists plunging the region into a long and violent conflict.<sup>4</sup>

The 2000 Census reports approximately 1,122,528 people who identify themselves as Vietnamese alone or 1,223,736 in combination with other ethnicities, ranking fourth among the Asian American groups.<sup>5</sup> Of those, 447,032 (39.8%) live in California and 134,961 (12.0%) in Texas. The greatest concentration of Vietnamese found outside of Vietnam is found in Orange County, California-approximately 135,548.<sup>6</sup> Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Minnesota, Washington, and Virginia have fast growing Vietnamese populations as well.<sup>7</sup> Recently, secondary immigration has led many Vietnamese families to Oklahoma City, OK and areas of Oregon.<sup>8</sup>

<b>Growth of Vietnamese Americans</b> www.census.gov	
Year	Number
1970	N/A
1980	245,025
1990	614,547
2000	1,122,528
2005 (est)	1,418,334

The majority of the Vietnam-born persons living in the U.S. arrived here as refugees beginning in 1975.<sup>9</sup> Heterogeneity is found in the refugee 'wave', generally not within the population as a whole. The first wave consisted of approximate 130,000 highly educated professionals from Saigon. Recent waves are generally families that are looking for better lives. The second wave, often called 'boat people,' escaped communist Vietnam by boat

<sup>1</sup> "History of the Vietnamese People" www.vietspring.org Accessed October 2006  
<sup>2</sup> "The Capital of Vietnam-Vietnamese history" http://columbia.thefreedictionary.com/Annam Accessed October 2006  
<sup>3</sup> "History of the Vietnamese People" www.vietspring.org Accessed October 2006  
<sup>4</sup> "History of Vietnam" http://columbia.thefreedictionary.com/Annam Accessed October 2006  
<sup>5</sup> "Vietnamese Americans" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\_American Accessed October 2006  
<sup>6</sup> "Vietnamese Americans" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\_American Accessed October 2006  
<sup>7</sup> "Vietnamese Americans" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\_American Accessed October 2006  
<sup>8</sup> "Vietnamese Americans" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese\_American Accessed October 2006  
<sup>9</sup> Kemp, Charles http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\_Kemp/vietnamese\_health.htm Accessed May 2006

and suffered tremendous hardships to come to America.<sup>10</sup> The third wave generally consists of children fathered by American soldiers and their Vietnamese mothers.<sup>11</sup>

### **World View**

Vietnam has suffered great political strife, and many Vietnamese-born Americans feel they are without a country. Vietnamese people in the United States share common world views with others from Southeast Asia. Some significant Chinese influences include great respect for the emperor, the teacher, and the father.<sup>12</sup>

### **Religion**

Approximately 90% of Vietnamese are Buddhist, 5-10% are Catholic or follow other branches of Christianity, <1 % are Muslim. The study of Buddhism involves a life philosophy that man was brought to this life to suffer. Suffering stems from the craving of the ego, wealth, fame and power<sup>13</sup>. To be free from this suffering, craving for personal gain or material gain must be controlled. Buddhists believe that people come from dirt, and to dirt people shall return, which in turn influences attitudes such as those in death and dying.

The path of Buddhism involves cycles of suffering and rebirth. Materialism and ego-related activities are looked down upon. The belief that suffering in the present decreases suffering in the next life may prevent Vietnamese from health-seeking remedies or preventive care.

The family is an important component of religion. Very few important decisions, particularly health decisions are made by individuals, but instead with family input.<sup>14</sup> Vietnamese people will rarely question authority or elders due to the Confucian emphasis on respect for those roles. Religious tolerance is a tenant of Vietnamese culture. With few exceptions, different groups coexist peacefully in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> Another important tenet of Confucianism involves the respect for ancestors and ancestral burial sites. Burial away from ancestral sites is distressing for many refugees.<sup>16</sup>

### **Language**

Vietnamese Language is heavily influenced by Chinese dialect, particularly Cantonese. Educated Vietnamese also speak French.<sup>17</sup> Meanings are similar, however the words are often pronounced differently. The language itself is monosyllabic with six distinct tones, creating a sing-song effect.<sup>18</sup> The same word can have many meanings based on tone.

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<sup>10</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>11</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>12</sup> Dang MD, Long. Personal Interview Nov. 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006  
<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den15908/religionireligioninvn.html>

<sup>14</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>15</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006  
<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den15908/religionireligioninvn.html>

<sup>16</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/J-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>17</sup> Dang MO, Long. Personal interview. Nov 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Nguyen, Tony "Vietnam Culture" <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den15908IWebsite> Accessed April 2006

"For example, the word *ma* has six different meanings according to the tone which the word carries: phantom, ghost; cheek; but, which, who; tomb; horse; young rice seedling."<sup>19</sup> Written language is a Romanized script based on the National Language.<sup>20</sup>

### **Social Structure**

Vietnamese people tend to be excessively polite and delicate. Frank honesty and speaking up are often considered rude, so many Vietnamese hide their true feelings or fears.<sup>21</sup>

Respect is the cornerstone of Vietnamese social interactions. Words can be expressed with a respectful or disrespectful tone that is very distinct.<sup>22</sup> Culturally, Vietnamese are friendly and giving people. Food and hospitality are related.<sup>23</sup> Vietnamese birthdays are all celebrated to coincide with the lunar New Year or 'Tet' which is usually sometime in February. Individual birthdays are not celebrated.<sup>24</sup>

### **Family Structure**

The Vietnamese family structure creates the framework of social-identity in the Vietnamese culture. Three generations typically live together with the oldest father in charge of maintaining family traditions and moral values.<sup>25</sup> According to Huynh Dinh Te, the Vietnamese family has more distinct and numerous members than in typical 'nuclear' American family.<sup>26</sup> The immediate family includes married relations, grandparents, and cousins.<sup>27</sup>

In Vietnam, last names come before the first name. Some have reversed this to conform to American tradition.<sup>28</sup> The father is the head of the family in Vietnamese society. However, he does not have absolute rights over his wife and children. Instead, "he shares with his wife collective and bilateral responsibility, legally, morally, and spiritually" (Dinh Te).

In early childhood, parents teach their children to behave based on principles of filial piety.<sup>29</sup> Children learn respect and obedience in the home. Obligation to parents continues beyond marriage. Filial piety includes the support of elderly parents in their old age. Vietnamese don't live in nursing homes, but instead in the home of the eldest son.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Nguyen, Tony "Vietnam Culture" <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/IWebsite> Accessed April 2006

<sup>20</sup> Nguyen, Tony "Vietnam Culture" <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/IWebsite> Accessed April 2006

<sup>21</sup> Sindler, Amy J. "Cultural Diversity as part of Nutrition Education and Counseling" Florida International University, Miami [http://nutritionandaging.tiu.edu/creative\\_solutions/nutrition\\_ed.asp](http://nutritionandaging.tiu.edu/creative_solutions/nutrition_ed.asp) posted 9/28/01 Accessed April 2006

<sup>22</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Social Interactions" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006 <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/Religion/ReligionInvn.html>

<sup>23</sup> Sindler, Amy J. "Cultural Diversity as part of Nutrition Education and Counseling" Florida International University, Miami [http://nutritionandaging.tiu.edu/creative\\_solutions/nutrition\\_ed.asp](http://nutritionandaging.tiu.edu/creative_solutions/nutrition_ed.asp) posted 9/28/01 Accessed April 2006

<sup>24</sup> Nguyen, Tony "Vietnam Culture" <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/IWebsite> Accessed April 2006

<sup>25</sup> Nguyen, Tony "Vietnam Culture" <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/IWebsite> Accessed April 2006

<sup>26</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006 <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/Religion/ReligionInvn.html>

<sup>27</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006 <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/Religion/ReligionInvn.html>

<sup>28</sup> Nguyen, Tony "Vietnam Culture" <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/IWebsite> Accessed April 2006

<sup>29</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006 <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/Religion/ReligionInvn.html>

<sup>30</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006 <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/5908/Religion/ReligionInvn.html>

Respect for parents continues past death and is practiced by ancestral worship and maintenance of ancestral burial grounds.<sup>31</sup>

### **Health Beliefs**

Most health beliefs are thought to overlap in three ways; spiritual (sickness from sorcery or evil spirits), balance, (too hot or cold), and a western version of 'germ theory.' Practitioners will use methods relating to all three spheres of health belief to heal a patient. Some healing rituals involve chanting, potions, and amulets.

Babies and small children commonly wear 'bua,' an amulet of cloth with a Buddhist verse that is tied to a string around the neck or wrist.<sup>32</sup> For serious illnesses, many times a Buddhist monk is called to pray in the home, and incense is burned.<sup>33</sup> The concept of mental illness does not exist in Vietnamese culture. Depression or other mental health issues are dealt with through spiritual remedies. Typically, Vietnamese people will not use psychologists or psychiatrists for this reason.

The Vietnamese concept of balance is a universal force comprised of two essences that harmonize one another. Health beliefs are strongly influenced by forces of hot and cold. Illness is considered to be an imbalance of 'vital forces'.<sup>34</sup> Balance is created by changes in diet when there is too much of one particular element: western medicines, or traditional remedies that involve herbs and medical practices. These medical practices are outlined below.<sup>35 36</sup>

- **Coining** (*Cao gio*). "Catch the wind." A coin dipped in mentholated oil is vigorously rubbed across the skin in a prescribed manner, causing a mild dermabrasion. This practice is believed to release the excess force "wind" from the body and hence restore balance. This is still a popular practice, also used by educated professionals.
- **Cupping** (*Giac*). A series of small, heated glasses are placed on the skin, forming a suction that leaves a red circular mark, drawing out the bad force. This practice is not as common as coining.
- **Pinching** (*Bat gio*). Similar to coining and cupping, the dermabrasion formed by pinching the skin allows the force to leave the body.
- **Steaming** (*Xong*). A mixture of medicinal herbs, such as eucalyptus, is boiled, the steam is inhaled, and the body bathed. Alternatively, a hot soup can be made and eaten, and then the patient would retire to bed and cover themselves completely for about 45 minutes, and "sweat" out the illness.
- **Balm**. Various medicated oils or balms, like Tiger balm, are rubbed over the skin.

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<sup>31</sup> Dinh Te, Huynh "Religion of the Vietnamese" Published on geocities. Accessed April 2006  
<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den15908/religionireligioninvn.html>

<sup>32</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>33</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>34</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>35</sup> Charles Kemp "Asian Health: Resources for cross-cultural care and prevention" First published on [http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles\\_Kemp/asian\\_health.html](http://www3.baylor.edu/Charles_Kemp/asian_health.html)1999. Last updated September 2004

<sup>36</sup> Dang MD, Long. Personal Interview. November 2006.

- **Acupuncture.** Specialized practitioners insert thin steel needles into specific locations known as vital-energy points. Each of these points has specific therapeutic effects on the corresponding organs.
- **Acupressure or Massage.** Fingers are pressed at the same points as with acupuncture, and together with massage, stimulate these points to maximize their therapeutic effects.
- **Herbs.** Various medicinal herbs are boiled in water in specific proportions or mixed with alcoholic beverages and consumed, for example, in the postpartum, to restore balance. The majority of these herbs is not harmful and poses little risk for patients if used properly. An example is ginseng, a popularly used root. In its most potent form, it is believed to control hypotension and fainting spells. The health care practitioner should encourage communication and provide relevant education to support these practices.

It should be noted that many of these practices are performed on young children, even infants, and the temporary dermabrasions they produce should not be confused with abuse or injury.

Vietnamese "traditional" medicine practitioners are called Occidental Doctors, or "OD." They are educated from one generation to the next, within families or through apprenticeships. There is no formal training and ODs are men only. In Vietnam, only the wealthy can afford to go to the MDs in clinics or hospitals. Pharmacy regulations are very relaxed, most oral medication can be obtained over the counter without a prescription. For this reason, Vietnamese patients seeing an MD always expect injections as treatment. Nurses in Vietnam also function in an expanded role, and are able to prescribe and give injections.<sup>37</sup>

Vietnamese do practice Western medicine and are well informed of life-saving antibiotics and disease causation, namely the germ theory.<sup>38</sup> However, Vietnamese seeking medical care often aim to relieve symptoms, and many believe medicine should be able to cure an illness right away. If medication is not prescribed, and injections given, patients will often seek care from another area.<sup>39</sup> Patients will typically discontinue medicines after symptoms diminish; if there are no symptoms, patients do not believe there is an illness. Thus, the prescription of preventive, long term medications must be accompanied by patient education in a culturally sensitive manner.<sup>40</sup>

Oral medication is viewed as 'hot' and is not received well by Vietnamese patients to treat 'hot' illnesses. They believe that Western medicines i.e. pills will cause more "hotness" to the body thus harm the body in the long run. They believe that the Eastern herbs are healthier for the body and resort back to the herbs once the symptoms recur. Skin irritation is considered a hot illness, thus a balm or poultice might better meet the patient's desire for balance than a pill in this case.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dang MD, Long. Personal Interview. November 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>39</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>40</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 2006

<sup>41</sup> Dinh-Chung PA-C, Helen. Personal Interview. November 2006.

Additionally, some Vietnamese believe that dosages are created with American or European body weights in mind, and self-adjust dosages. Patient education should include assuring the patient that the prescribed dosages are appropriate for their height and weight. Immunizations are well received by Vietnamese patients and family members.

### **Implications for Health Practitioners**

Vietnamese patients greatly respect educated individuals, particularly physicians. Doctors are considered experts, thus there is an expectation for a diagnosis and treatment at the first visit.<sup>42</sup> Vietnamese patients are uncomfortable with invasive laboratory or diagnostic tests, and do not trust the competence of physicians who cannot diagnose symptoms quickly and accurately.<sup>43</sup> Blood loss is concerning, and perceived as a practice that will make one sicker. Hence, surgery is feared. Removal of organs is seen as a last resort, as it alters the internal balance.<sup>44</sup>

### **Women's Health**

Women do not typically increase caloric intake during pregnancy and rarely introduce milk to their diets. Infants are breastfed for approximately one year. In many cases and as early as one month, rice gruel (rice flour and water) is introduced to babies in the first year.<sup>45</sup>

A significant disparity exists in women's health screenings. Women seldom have Pap and breast exams done because of fears regarding invasion of privacy, embarrassment, and lack of knowledge on cervical, ovarian and breast cancer in the community.<sup>46</sup>

Beginning in the teenage years, examination of female patients should be done by female practitioners whenever possible. This is particularly important during sensitive exams, such as pelvic and breast exams. The presence of a female medical assistant in the room with a male physician is not an acceptable compromise for the Vietnamese patient.<sup>47</sup>

### **Death and Dying**

Death and dying of a family member or loved one is an emotional lengthy process in the Vietnamese community, with many associated rituals. When someone becomes very ill, it is customary for the whole extended family to visit in shifts, saying their goodbyes, and trying to help the individual with whatever skills they might have, whether they are a doctor, nurse, cook, or can tell a cheery joke.<sup>48</sup> Intense emotion is expressed and encouraged, "all manners of grief [are] shown; from stoic solemnity to weeping, crying, sobbing and screaming."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.eduJ-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.eduJ-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 200

<sup>43</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.eduJ-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.eduJ-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 200

<sup>44</sup> Kemp, Charles [http://www3.baylor.eduJ-Charles\\_Kemp/vietnamese\\_health.htm](http://www3.baylor.eduJ-Charles_Kemp/vietnamese_health.htm) Accessed May 200

<sup>45</sup> Betancourt, Diedre "Cultural Diversity-Eating in America: Vietnamese"

<sup>46</sup> Dinh-Chung PA-C, Helen. Personal Interview. November 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Dang MD, Long. Personal Interview. November 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Hoang, Dieu-Hien T. "Death Rituals in Vietnamese Society" (December 2000) Edited by Scott Beveridge, Health Sciences Library Harborview Health Sciences Center, University of Washington

<sup>49</sup> Hoang, Dieu-Hien T. "Death Rituals in Vietnamese Society" (December 2000) Edited by Scott Beveridge, Health Sciences Library Harborview Health Sciences Center, University of Washington



The coffin of the deceased often remains in the home for three days, and relatives, neighbors, colleagues and friends come to pay respects. Guests donate money and flowers according to ability and closeness with the family.<sup>50</sup> Family members keep vigil over the coffin at all times. Cremation fulfills the Buddhist philosophy of coming from and returning to dirt.<sup>51</sup> The grieving family is strongly emotionally supported by extended family and friends for two to three years.<sup>52</sup> For forty-nine days after death, families hold memorial services every seven days. These services involve sharing meals with friends and relatives.<sup>53</sup> Gatherings for memorial are then held one hundred days after death, two-hundred sixty-five days later, and then one year later.<sup>54</sup> Chronic depression often develops afterward, but Vietnamese often do not seek help because they view it as normal.

### **Diet and Nutrition**

The traditional Vietnamese diet is based on an agricultural lifestyle and is considered very healthy.<sup>55</sup> In Vietnam, food is either grown at home or purchased daily.<sup>56</sup> Three meals a day typically consist of rice, vegetables and small amounts of meat and fish.<sup>57</sup> Vietnamese cooking is similar to Chinese cooking, though with little or no fat or oil. Vietnam-born Vietnamese tend to lack enzymes needed to digest dairy, and many tend to have a form of lactose intolerance.<sup>58</sup> Fruits such as bananas, mangos, papayas, oranges, coconuts and pineapples are popular snacks.<sup>59</sup>

According to the University of Washington (UW) Harborview Medical Center, in interviews, many parents complained that their children eat poorly, preferring western fast foods with few fruits and vegetables. U.S. vegetables are similar to those in Vietnam; however, the fruits here are unfamiliar. Researchers at UW note that Seattle's international district carries traditional Vietnamese foods.<sup>60</sup>

Due to dietary and lifestyle changes, Vietnamese in America are susceptible to weight gain, high cholesterol and diabetes.<sup>61</sup> Use of coconut milk and coconut oil as well as increased meat intake leads to heavy consumption of saturated fats. Vietnamese with diabetes have trouble controlling their blood sugar on account of an emphasis on white rice in their diets.<sup>62</sup> Fish sauce and MSG are used often, resulting in a diet high in salt.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hoang, Dieu-Hien T. "Death Rituals in Vietnamese Society" (December 2000) Edited by Scott Beveridge, Health Sciences Library Harborview Health Sciences Center, University of Washington

<sup>51</sup> Dang MD, Long. Personal Interview. November 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Hoang, Dieu-Hien T. "Death Rituals in Vietnamese Society" (December 2000) Edited by Scott Beveridge, Health Sciences Library Harborview Health Sciences Center, University of Washington

<sup>53</sup> Hoang, Dieu-Hien T. "Death Rituals in Vietnamese Society" (December 2000) Edited by Scott Beveridge, Health Sciences Library Harborview Health Sciences Center, University of Washington

<sup>54</sup> Hoang, Dieu-Hien T. "Death Rituals in Vietnamese Society" (December 2000) Edited by Scott Beveridge, Health Sciences Library Harborview Health Sciences Center, University of Washington

<sup>55</sup> Tu, Janet "Nutrition and Fasting in Vietnamese Culture" (2001 March) Edited by Lundgreen Kim, Kwan-Gett Tao and Piccinin, Doris. Accessed on ethnomed.com June 2006

<sup>56</sup> Betancourt, Diedre "Cultural Diversity-Eating in America: Vietnamese"

<sup>57</sup> Betancourt, Diedre "Cultural Diversity-Eating in America: Vietnamese"

<sup>58</sup> Betancourt, Diedre "Cultural Diversity-Eating in America: Vietnamese"

<sup>59</sup> Betancourt, Diedre "Cultural Diversity-Eating in America: Vietnamese"

<sup>60</sup> University of Washington Harborview Medical Center ethnomed.com accessed June 2006

<sup>61</sup> Tu, Janet "Nutrition and Fasting in Vietnamese Culture" (2001 March) Edited by Lundgreen Kim, Kwan-Gett Tao and Piccinin, Doris. Accessed on ethnomed.com June 2006

<sup>62</sup> Tu, Janet "Nutrition and Fasting in Vietnamese Culture" (2001 March) Edited by Lundgreen Kim, Kwan-Gett Tao and Piccinin, Doris. Accessed on ethnomed.com June 2006

## **Mental Health**

Mental illness is considered shameful in Vietnamese culture. Family members are often hidden away by their families or placed in a hospital. "The Hill People" or those who live a nomadic, rural lifestyle think of mental illness "as bad karma that has accumulated because of misdeeds done in past lives".<sup>64</sup> Some believe that Mental Health is a punishment or torture for a previous life's crime; therefore they must suffer and will not seek medical attention.<sup>65</sup>

## **Other Health Challenges**

Nutritional deficits may be a challenge, because the concept of a "balanced" diet is not real to Vietnamese patients. A daily multivitamin should be recommended.

Newly arrived immigrants should be evaluated to diseases common to refugees: Hepatitis B, Tuberculosis, Parasites (roundworm, hookworm, filaria, flukes, amoebae, giardia), Malaria, HIV, and Hansen's disease.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Vietnamese population highly values medical professions. Compliance with recommended regimens is enhanced by detailed and careful education, particularly when the education is focused on preventive care, which is not common to this culture. Keep in mind that as a culture that is more formal than American culture, addressing those of middle age and older should also be more formal, using titles when possible (Mr. Mrs. etc). Particular attention to cultural preferences will assist health care providers in being very successful with Vietnamese families.

*The Molina Institute for Cultural Competency is a department within Molina Healthcare, Inc. located in Long Beach, California. The Molina Institute researches, evaluates, and applies cultural concepts that are employee, provider, and patient-friendly. Molina Healthcare, Inc. is a multi-state managed care organization that arranges for the delivery of healthcare services to persons eligible for Medicaid and other government-sponsored programs for low-income families and individuals. Additional information about Molina Healthcare, Inc. can be found at [www.molinahealthcare.com](http://www.molinahealthcare.com).*

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<sup>63</sup> Tu, Janet "Nutrition and Fasting in Vietnamese Culture" (2001 March) Edited by Lundgreen Kim, Kwan-Gett Tao and Piccinin, Doris. Accessed on ethnomed.com June 2006

<sup>64</sup> University of Washington Harborview Health Center ethnomed.com Accessed June 2006

<sup>65</sup> Dinh-Chung PA-C, Helen. Personal Interview. November 2006.



**CME POST -TEST**  
**Vietnamese Culture:**  
**Influences and Implications for Health Care**

**Please circle correct answer.**

1. The belief that suffering in the present decreases suffering in the next life may prevent Vietnamese from health-seeking remedies or preventive care.

**True**

**False**

2. The concept of mental illness does not exist in Vietnamese culture.

**True**

**False**

3. Practices performed on young children and infants which may cause temporary dermabrasions which could be confused with abuse or injury include:

**a. Coining (*Cao gio*).**

**b. Cupping (*Giac*).**

**c. Pinching (*Bat gio*).**

**d. Steaming (*Xong*)**

**e. all of the above**

4. Vietnamese patients may expect nurses to function in an expanded role, including prescribing medications.

**True**

**False**

5. The presence of a female medical assistant in the room with a male physician for a sensitive physical exam is not an acceptable compromise for the Vietnamese patient.

**True**

**False**

6. Please rate this article on applicability and usefulness to your practice:

**Very useful      1      2      3      4      5      Not useful**