

Untangling Beliefs: Dementia Across different Cultures

In our years of collaborating with various care home providers, communities, and families, it has become evident that the perception of Dementia varies significantly across cultures. This was highlighted again only last week when we were speaking to a care home manager who's staff support people living with Dementia. Our November article aims to explore diverse views on Dementia, examining the development of these ideas and their implications for individuals living with dementia.

Beliefs and Perceptions:

In the UK and the Western world, dementia is often seen through a medical lens. However, in countries like Japan, where familial care is emphasised, dementia is considered a natural part of aging to be collectively managed within the family (Kudo, 2009). Similarly, in some Asian cultures, dementia is perceived as a normal part of ageing, and herbal remedies and acupuncture are considered alternatives to medical intervention (Wang et al., 2005), which contradicts more advanced and established research evidence that dementia is in fact not a normal part of ageing.

Beliefs around dementia shape diverse narratives. Some cultures can stigmatise dementia, causing isolation, while others are inclusive, communal approaches. For example, in some African communities, communal living and caregiving are integral, reducing the feeling of isolation for individuals living with dementia (Ogunniyi et al., 2004).

Historical roots:

History may also be a big influence too. Native American communities, who have been through tough events may bring in spiritual rituals and community support when taking care of someone with dementia (Smith et al., 2020). Understanding this historical side gives us helpful ideas about how communities deal with and look after people living with dementia.

The Role of Spirituality:

Spirituality often intertwines with dementia beliefs too. In India, where Hinduism is predominant, some may view dementia as a result of past karma or an an evil spirit and therefore they may integrate spiritual practices into caregiving (Prince et al., 2003). Comparing this to Western ways, where spirituality might play a less central role, highlights the diversity in approaches to dementia care.

Inclusive training needed:

Diverse beliefs bring both challenges and opportunities. Stigma and misconceptions may lead to inadequate care, but learning about different views can enhance understanding and improve care, not just for the person living with Dementia, but for staff and family members too. Over the years we have learnt so much ourselves on how Dementia is viewed for different care staff and families with a different culture to ours. Importantly with many staff in the Health and social care sector of different cultures, this understanding of this we believe is crucial. Recognising this presents opportunities for developing more inclusive and effective care strategies.

To navigate this complexity, training and observational practice is crucial for everyone involved in dementia care. It involves cultivating a non-judgmental understanding of other people's cultural beliefs but understanding that knowledge about dementia is continuously evolving. What we know now, we did not know ten years ago and we hope that in another ten years we may know more! Working in Dementia Care the need to be flexible and open minded to change due to research and evidence based practice is crucial.

In conclusion, dementia is a challenge worldwide, and it's crucial to recognise the rich differences of cultural beliefs linked to it. Embracing and respecting different viewpoints helps us approach dementia care with more compassion. As we keep learning more about dementia through up to date research, our understanding grows. This underlines the ongoing importance of staying educated and being culturally aware in providing the best care possible.

Please do get in contact with us at info@mindful-care.co.uk to find out how we can support you or your service.

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