Reflective Practice Essay: Exploring Health Beliefs and Determinants of Health

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Introduction

This paper will explore my personal definition of health concurrent with its definitions by World Health Organization. Using self reflection, it will also discuss my current health and cultural beliefs in the context of my health practices. Along with this, the paper will explain how social status and income as well as employment and working conditions as health determinant factors that influence my health practice. It will also study, by comparison, the health beliefs of one of my peers from a different cultural background. With this, I will explain the strategies I employ to improve my health. And finally, from this comparative learning and self reflection, I would discuss how it would benefit and enrich my future nursing experience.

Definition of Health and My Personal and Current Health Beliefs

The way health is defined depends on one’s cultural or socio-economic background. I tend to see life from a holistic point of view. I believe health is more than just a physical wellbeing. It is more than social, emotional, and material wellbeing. It goes beyond to a state of balanced harmony in one’s bio-psycho-social wellbeing with holism as the key. I see health more as a homeostatic balance in one’s physical and mental state with more importance given to the latter. Thus, my definition of health alliances well with the definition by World Health Organization that succinctly defined health in 1946 as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 2006, p. 1).

My health beliefs are reflective of my past experiences and my cultural as well as Buddhist background. I believe health as an engine to serve others. Without health one cannot achieve anything not even enlightenment. So on top eating well balanced diet and three meals a
day and regular exercise, taking care of one’s spiritual being is also key to achieve good health. And in that regard, I regard mind as an important player in my health. Therefore, I constantly strive to give equal importance to mental health as well through prayer and meditation. When I maintain an inner calm and peace, this positively affects my physical body and immune and general functions in many mysterious ways. Doing this, I hardly get sick and flu. In spite of our best efforts in dealing with our health, we are all prone to health determinant factors related to our health practices.

*Health Determinant Factors That Influence my Health Practices*

Each individual has different factors that affect their health status based one’s socio-economic as well as cultural background. Two particular health determinant factors that affect my current health practices are social status and income, and employment and working condition.

Firstly, in today’s world, good health comes at a price. And health in general of an individual is linked with income and social status (Kozier et al., 2010). I used to live in a country where organic food is daily part of our living. It was both affordable and plenty. Now, as a new immigrant in Canada, this is quite a challenge for me. Honestly, my current income and social status lie in the lower, if not the lowest, rank of the Canadian economic ladder, and that has health implications in a very subtle way, at least, on me. Even though I know organic foods are more nutrient dense and healthier, but I could not afford them on a daily basis based on my current income. And I notice most of the food items for sale in China town, Food Basics and No Frills- frequented by low income families in Canada-where I shop daily are usually of lower
quality in terms of freshness, expiry date, and quality. So my long term health implication from this is yet to be seen.

Secondly, employment and working condition affects personal health. Kozier et al. have clearly stated: “People who have more control over their circumstances and fewer stress-related job demands are healthier and often live longer” (Kozier et al., p. 126). Before the school, I worked in bakery. The work involved heavy lifting of flour bags weighing more than fifty pounds and lots of bending and sometimes kneeling. Sometimes I did feel pain in the back, legs, and arms. On top of that, my work station was in the basement of a hundred something year old building in the heart of a downtown. So, there was and is always a concern in me about lead and asbestos exposure even though health Canada personal did come for building inspection and safety. And in the summer, the basement is extremely hot.

Aside from that, the stress usually was there when employer used to rush, sometimes, in an unprofessional, foul language, to pace up the work during peak season like Christmas and holidays. But I did check up with my family doctor and so far he could not find any serious findings, even though I still do feel mild pain in the finger and back occasionally. I take this as good learning experience about work environment affecting my health.

Cultural Beliefs

My cultural beliefs affect my personal health practice in positive ways. Tibetans believe in the power of food, tea or boiled water, and meditation as a way to treat and obtain optimum health. Tibetans treat food as best medicine; everything we put in our mouth should have a beneficial purpose. Barley, a fiber rich whole grain is the staple food in Tibet’s cold environment. And we believe barley soup boiled for many hours could cure digestive ailments,
aids in cleansing, and even alleviate depression. Plus, daily intake of more three liters of black organic tea is normal for most. I too have a habit of drinking several cups of tea every day, and I also resort to barley soup and tea as a way to bring in healing when I get severe cold and feeling down and not well. In times of stress and emotional downs, I resort to meditation. Surprisingly, it seems to work.

*Personal Health Practices: Strategies to improve personal health Practices*

My strategy starts from three fronts: nutrition, mental well being, and regular physical exercise. Doing well in these three fronts would be crucial to personal health practices.

In terms of nutrition, I would develop a nutrition plan that follows Canadian food Guidelines. I would work on to consume more whole grain, fruits and vegetables. In terms of mental wellbeing, I will continue to do my meditation, and think positively even in the worst of circumstances in life. This help me clears up my mind, empty negative energy from my system, and I become whole person but more focused and aware of my being. On top of all these, I will develop a habit of doing regular physical exercise to optimize the functional capacity of my lung, heart, limbs, hands, bones and all.

*Comparative Study of Health Beliefs of a Peer from a Different Culture*

Comparing my health beliefs with a peer from a different cultural background was a very rewarding, learning experience. I found there are lots of similarities amid some differences. Interestingly, my peer is from religious and cultural traditions entirely different than mine. We speak different language and hold different views of God. But on the deeper level, I found our purpose is same when it comes to health beliefs and health practice. I am pretty impressed by his statement about his nutrition. He stated he never skipped any meals- he always takes his
breakfast and dinner on time. This I think is very good for one’s physical health. I agree with him.

On the spiritual side, my peer is a devout Muslim. And his daily life routine reflects his health beliefs. He gets up early in the morning for *Fajar- a Muslim* prayer. He mentioned prayer makes him a better human being, more punctual, disciplined, and healthier. I see similarity in this because I too have felt the same even though we prayed differently are from completely different religious faiths. He has a habit of getting up early in the morning almost daily before sun rise. And his rationale for this is that he gets surplus amount of oxygen in the morning. Interestingly, he finds prayer as exercise for his body as well.

Just as my peer’s culture and health belief is rooted in his faith, Tibetan culture too is deeply rooted in Buddhist way of life. So, a daily meditation is a norm for most Tibetans. I try to meditate on compassion for all sentient beings in the universe. I chant sacred mantra like- *Om mani padme hung* which, we believe, radiates harmony and peace to the universe by its holy sound. This spiritual practice positively influences my mood, emotion, and physical wellbeing. And just like peer, I do believe in the benefits of inhaling fresh morning air in the park and forest. My encounter with my peer has enlightened me about the beauty of different health beliefs from different culture thus enriching my future nursing practice with a new sense of awareness.

*Positive Influence on me from this Comparative Study for My Future Nursing Experience*

My future nursing practice will be been greatly enriched by this comparative learning and through this paper. I have learned about the importance of cultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, and the importance of self reflection. Professional nursing involves knowing oneself to the core through self-reflection, self-awareness and recognition with respect of people from all
cultural backgrounds. And creative problem solving skill also involves wide variety of method to bring wellness in a client including giving space to a client to safely follow and implement one’s culturally developed health beliefs. Competent nursing care involves cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cultural safety (Kozier et al., 2010).

In a real world, diversity in client population is both a blessing and a challenge in nursing practice. And Canada being a leading nation advocating multi-culturism and since Canadian population is composed of people from all diverse cultures from the world, cultural awareness is important in rendering effective and professional nursing care. So I would endeavour to be culturally more sensitive to all my future clients. I would learn to respect, promote, and allow space, whenever possible and appropriate, cultural accommodation during my assessment, planning, intervention and evaluation of nursing care plan.

Conclusion

On the whole, health is perhaps the greatest wealth a man can possess. But health is not just a mere absence of disease. And health truly is achieved if one’s physical, social, psychological, and emotional needs are properly met. Without health, our dream and ambitions in life would never be realized. As a nurse, healthy body and mind means better care for our clients. And as a future nurse, it is also pertinent to be aware of one’s own health beliefs stemmed from one’s unique cultural upbringing in addition to recognizing the importance of respecting and being sensitive to clients of diverse cultural backgrounds. This will ensure I can become a better nurse who can effectively implement cultural awareness, cultural safety, and cultural sensitivity as professional tool when giving care to a client to promote health. All in all, health truly is an engine to drive and materialize one’s noble purpose in life.
References
