

VIETNAMESE-AUSTRALIAN

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON ILLNESS AND DYING

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- Essential elements for Healthcare chaplains

Cultural Profile

Immigration

The major waves of Vietnamese migration to Australia

- The first group who came to Australia prior 1975 - mostly tertiary students, orphans, and wives of Australian military personnel who had served in South Vietnam.
- The second wave of refugees in 1978 - more diverse group, with a large scale exodus of boat people travelling to Australia directly. This group included people with different ethnicities, nationalities, religions and languages.
- A third wave of refugees arrived from 1982 onwards under the Family Reunion Program.

Cultural Profile

Population & Age

Geographic Distribution

Census in 2011 recorded 185,039 Vietnam-born people in Australia, increase of 15.8% from the 2006 Census)

New South Wales 71,838

Victoria 68,294 (*concentrated in the western and south-eastern suburbs*)

Queensland 16,269

Western Australia 12,715

Age and Sex

2.4% aged 0-14 years | 7.5% aged 15-24 years | 43.9% aged 25-44 years

37.9% aged 45-64 years | 8.2% aged 65 years and over

The sex ratio 84.6 males : 100 females

The Vietnamese community will experience pronounced ageing, with three times as many in the 45-64 cohort as over 65

(Source: ABS Census 2011)

Cultural Profile

Language & Religion

Language

Of the 185,039 Vietnam-born who spoke a language other than English at home:

56.5% spoke English very well or well,
42.1% spoke English not well or not at all

2/3 of Vietnamese aged 45-64 are not proficient in English

Religion

The major religious affiliations amongst Vietnam-born:

Buddhism (104,066)

Catholic (39,895)

Some forms of ancestor veneration are also common

(Source: ABS Census 2011)

Cultural Profile

Health in Australia

- Average life expectancy in Vietnam is 72.2 years (male 69.7, female 74.9) compared to 81.7 years for all people living in Australia (male 79.3, female 84.3).
- Vietnamese-Australian men have higher mortality from cancers of the digestive system.
- Vietnamese-Australian women have higher rates of cervical cancer compared to the rest of the Australian population.
- Both Vietnam-born men and women have relatively high rates of lung and liver cancer.

(Source: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The world fact book. CIA; 2010. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>)

Values & Beliefs

Family Structure

- Very family oriented, both nuclear and extended.
- The Vietnamese immediate family includes not only the husband, wife, and their unmarried children, but also the husband's parents and the sons' wives and children.
- The extended family consists of the immediate family and close relatives who share the same family name and ancestors and who live in the same community.
- Father or eldest son represent the family and make decisions.
- Women are responsible for the care of an ill family member.

Values & Beliefs

Duty & Honour

- Duty and honour are among the highest cultural values. Individuals are instilled from childhood with the values of honour, hard work and loyalty to the family.
- Individuals have the ultimate duty to carry themselves with the utmost dignity in all circumstances so as to not bring shame to oneself and the family.
- Each family member adheres to a specific hierarchical role. For example, the role of the parents is to raise their children properly. Their duties are not limited to providing food and shelter, but require them to educate and instil the children with moral values. The children in turn have the duties to obey their parents and never to question their authority or teaching. When the parents get older, it is the duty of the children to take care of them.

Cultural Aspects

Health and Illness – Traditional Perspectives

- Many Vietnamese believe that Asian people are different physiologically than white people. Western medicines are thought of as “hot” and too potent for their physiology.
- Complementary practices, in the hope of a cure, are strong components of care in the Vietnamese community, e.g. ingestion of herbal medicines and acupuncture.
- Vietnamese elderly hesitate to seek care at a hospital because they are afraid of the hospital environment or uneasy about the kinds of treatments used there.
- Nowadays, hospitalisation is generally accepted by the Vietnamese elderly. It is considered to cause bad luck for the family if the patient does not die at home.

Cultural Aspects

Care for Sick and Dying - Hospitalised

- Vietnamese prefer privacy and often want curtains pulled around the bed. Often do not reveal the body area between waist and knees, even to closest relatives.
- Patient may prefer family member of the same sex to assist with personal care. Patient acts passively and expects to be cared for by a family member.
- In caring for Vietnamese older adults, the hierarchical tradition places the eldest male as the primary decision maker in the family.

Cultural Aspects

Care for Sick & Dying - Decision Making

- Traditionally, the eldest male is the family spokesman; often the person with the best English assumes this role.
- If there is no son in the family, the eldest son-in-law or the eldest male relative becomes the primary decision maker. However, the caregiving of Vietnamese older adults usually fall upon the eldest son's wife or unmarried family members.
- Removal of life support may require extensive family discussion, placing the responsibility for the decision on the entire family rather than on one individual.

(One of the family had called Viet Nam and had the dying patient's fortune read. The family was told this was not only a terrible bad luck day for the patient to die, (bad for rebirth) but also would be bad luck for the family. The patient had to be put back on life support to be kept alive).

Cultural Aspects

Spiritual Care Approaches in Death and Dying

- Vietnamese have certain beliefs and practices about the care of the body after a loved one has passed away.
- There is intensive and extensive family and community involvement throughout the whole process with the immediate family.
- Normally the eldest son of the family will be in charge of all the ceremonies and rituals. In most families, there is an experienced elderly relative who will advise on the necessary rituals and prescribed behaviour.

"The family takes care of the death body. I think the best thing a nurse can do is just to be physically present. Their eyes must be closed after they die because we believe that if their eyes are still open after their death then they still have things they can't let go and their spirit will linger until the tasks or wishes are done". (Tran, 2010)

Cultural Aspects

Spiritual Care Approaches in Death and Dying

- When a death is about to occur, the entire family will gather around the patient in complete silence. This is one of the most important rites in familial involvement.
- The dying person's head should be facing east to show that he is dying of natural causes.
- Emotional and spiritual issues are more important than physical issues, regardless of religion.
- Quiet should be maintained in the room.
- Vietnamese Catholics have a strong need to pray to God, to help the dying person reach Heaven.
- Vietnamese Buddhists consult their Monk in time of death.

An ancient Vietnamese proverb states,
“The sense of the dead is that of the final”,
referring to the dignified and solemn manner
in which family members are buried, or sent
into the next life.

Essential Elements for Healthcare Chaplains

- ⦿ The most important people to the dying patient are, in order:
 - Doctor
 - Family
 - Spiritual advisor - Monk, Priest, Nun
 - Friend, Neighbour, member of Vietnamese association (if they belong to one)
- ⦿ Important to understand the differences and similarities between cultures and traditions.
- ⦿ Do not assume that patients will have an extended family that is able to support the dying person. Seek out culturally specific community services. Where these are not available, discuss patient and family needs with local service providers.

Essential Elements for Healthcare Chaplains

- The 'spokesperson' in each family may differ, no matter what is the custom. It may be that usually it is the older son, but family circumstances now dictate it is the youngest daughter. Always check and do not assume. It is important to reiterate that the view of the patient may differ from that of the 'spokesperson' and hence there may be some difficulties or 'politics' surrounding meeting the needs of the person who is ill and not breaching customary or familial boundaries.
- Consider a family meeting. The key decision-maker may not be the same person as the primary caregiver. Be aware of family dynamics, and power relationships.
- Offer the family the opportunity to have a Priest or religious adviser in attendance, to assist with prayer and other rituals.

Essential Elements for Healthcare Chaplains

- ① Do not hesitate to ask about other relevant cultural aspects. It is respectful to show an interest in other cultures.
- ① Allow time and be aware of customs that show respect. This will help to establish a strong rapport with the patient, family and their friends.
- ① The different religions have varying degrees of adherence and influence amongst communities. Sometimes there are different practices depending upon the geographic region of origin of the individual. As always, it is important to ask the person and their family.

Thank you

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Table 4
Year of Arrival of Vietnam-born and Total Victorian Overseas-born: 2011

Year of arrival ^(a)	Vietnam-born		Total Overseas-born, Vic	
	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total
1895-1940	4	0.0	4,197	0.3
1941-1950	0	0.0	29,319	2.1
1951-1960	33	0.0	126,274	9.0
1961-1970	105	0.2	181,997	13.0
1971-1980	9,369	13.7	142,547	10.1
1981-1990	25,471	37.3	198,383	14.1
1991-2000	15,503	22.7	194,015	13.8
2001-2010	13,284	19.5	436,457	31.1
Jan 2011-Aug 2011	855	1.3	31,271	2.2
Not stated	3,671	5.4	60,871	4.3
Victoria	68,295	100.0	1,405,331	100.0

^(a)This variable records the year of arrival in Australia for people born overseas who intend staying in Australia for at least one year.

Table 6
Age Groups of Vietnam-born and the Total Victorian Population: 2011, 2006

Age group (years)	Vietnam-born						Total Victorian population					
	2011		2006		Change 2006-2011		2011		2006		Change 2006-2011	
	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total	Persons	% change	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total	Persons	% change
0 - 4	303	0.4	241	0.4	62	25.7	344,733	6.4	305,940	6.2	38,793	12.7
5 - 11	741	1.1	547	0.9	194	35.5	455,691	8.5	445,513	9.0	10,178	2.3
12 - 18	1,648	2.4	1,483	2.5	165	11.1	473,671	8.8	467,268	9.5	6,403	1.4
19 - 25	5,329	7.8	5,131	8.7	198	3.9	521,593	9.7	471,490	9.6	50,103	10.6
26 - 34	12,005	17.6	13,160	22.4	-1,155	-8.8	684,432	12.8	611,946	12.4	72,486	11.8
35 - 44	17,389	25.5	15,636	26.6	1,753	11.2	774,616	14.5	741,351	15.0	33,265	4.5
45 - 54	16,174	23.7	13,629	23.1	2,545	18.7	726,474	13.6	679,520	13.8	46,954	6.9
55 - 64	9,366	13.7	4,944	8.4	4,422	89.4	611,249	11.4	534,486	10.8	76,763	14.4
65 - 74	3,013	4.4	2,409	4.1	604	25.1	402,224	7.5	345,530	7.0	56,694	16.4
75 - 84	1,813	2.7	1,376	2.3	437	31.8	254,359	4.8	245,508	5.0	8,851	3.6
85 - 94	477	0.7	295	0.5	182	61.7	97,674	1.8	77,834	1.6	19,840	25.5
95 >	36	0.1	23	0.0	13	56.5	7,323	0.1	6,036	0.1	1,287	21.3
Victoria	68,294	100.0	58,874	100.0	9,420	16.0	5,354,039	100.0	4,932,422	100.0	421,617	8.5
Median Age (in years)	42		40				37		37			
Sex Ratio (males per 100 females)	85		89				97		96			

Table 7
Proficiency in Spoken English, Vietnam-born, Victoria: 2011, 2006

Proficiency in spoken English ^(a)	Vietnam-born						Total Victorian population					
	2011		2006		Change 2006-2011		2011		2006		Change 2006-2011	
	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total	Persons	% change	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total	Persons	% change
<i>Speaks English only</i>	1,791	2.6	1,384	2.4	407	29.4	3,874,858	72.4	3,668,284	74.4	206,574	5.6
<i>Speaks other lang & speaks English:</i>												
Very well	14,411	21.1	12,797	21.7	1,614	12.6	691,037	12.9	552,019	11.2	139,018	25.2
Well	22,911	33.5	19,111	32.5	3,800	19.9	332,894	6.2	268,072	5.4	64,822	24.2
Not well	23,118	33.9	20,089	34.1	3,029	15.1	167,826	3.1	149,701	3.0	18,125	12.1
Not at all	5,204	7.6	4,764	8.1	440	9.2	44,800	0.8	37,060	0.8	7,740	20.9
<i>Not stated^(b)</i>	859	1.3	728	1.2	131	18.0	242,624	4.5	257,286	5.2	-14,662	-5.7
Victoria	68,294	100.0	58,873	100.0	9,421	16.0	5,354,039	100.0	4,932,422	100.0	421,617	8.5

^(a)This is a self-assessment.

^(b)Not stated includes 'language or English proficiency not stated' and 'both language and English proficiency not stated'.

Table 9
Religious Affiliation (Top Twenty), Vietnam-born and the Total Victorian
Population: 2011, 2006

Religion	Vietnam-born						Total Victorian population					
	2011		2006		Change 2006-2011		2011		2006		Change 2006-2011	
	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total	Persons	% change	Persons	% of total	Persons	% of total	Persons	% change
Buddhism	38,437	56.3	34,635	58.8	3,802	11.0	168,640	3.1	132,633	2.7	36,007	27.1
Western Catholic	14,436	21.1	12,690	21.6	1,746	13.8	1,421,744	26.6	1,349,656	27.4	72,088	5.3
Baptist	914	1.3	722	1.2	192	26.6	77,852	1.5	69,118	1.4	8,734	12.6
Christian, nfd	354	0.5	300	0.5	54	18.0	98,377	1.8	67,495	1.4	30,882	45.8
Uniting Church	319	0.5	239	0.4	80	33.5	250,937	4.7	274,056	5.6	-23,119	-8.4
Other Protestant, nfd	150	0.2	163	0.3	-13	-8.0	6,291	0.1	5,599	0.1	692	12.4
Caodaism	137	0.2	130	0.2	7	5.4	206	0.0	194	0.0	12	6.2
Anglican Church of Australia	122	0.2	105	0.2	17	16.2	656,531	12.3	671,607	13.6	-15,076	-2.2
Islam	95	0.1	85	0.1	10	11.8	152,778	2.9	109,369	2.2	43,409	39.7
Presbyterian	83	0.1	34	0.1	49	144.1	139,282	2.6	140,282	2.8	-1,000	-0.7
Jehovah's Witnesses	77	0.1	54	0.1	23	42.6	15,179	0.3	14,136	0.3	1,043	7.4
Ancestor Veneration	67	0.1	65	0.1	2	3.1	165	0.0	177	0.0	-12	-6.8
Pentecostal, nfd	60	0.1	28	0.0	32	114.3	38,545	0.7	20,918	0.4	17,627	84.3
Christian and Missionary Alliance	41	0.1	19	0.0	22	115.8	249	0.0	313	0.0	-64	-20.4
Taoism	39	0.1	24	0.0	15	62.5	1,053	0.0	892	0.0	161	18.0
Churches of Christ (Conference)	33	0.0	30	0.1	3	10.0	11,968	0.2	13,799	0.3	-1,831	-13.3
Greek Orthodox	27	0.0	31	0.1	-4	-12.9	167,759	3.1	163,169	3.3	4,590	2.8
Hinduism	26	0.0	3	0.0	23	766.7	83,135	1.6	42,308	0.9	40,827	96.5
Confucianism	25	0.0	24	0.0	1	4.2	127	0.0	97	0.0	30	30.9
Church of Jesus Christ of LDS (Mormons)	19	0.0	17	0.0	2	11.8	10,881	0.2	9,691	0.2	1,190	12.3
No religion	10,504	15.4	7,245	12.3	3,259	45.0	1,283,872	24.0	1,007,410	20.4	276,462	27.4
Other religions	123	0.2	127	0.2	-4	-3.1	277,459	5.2	253,434	5.1	24,025	9.5
Not stated etc ⁽⁹⁾	2,208	3.2	2,106	3.6	102	4.8	491,009	9.2	586,069	11.9	-95,060	-16.2