A Look at the Filipino-American Culture

FACTS AT A GLANCE:

• The Philippines is an independent nation in the Pacific Ocean near the southeastern coast of China. Most people in the Philippines are of Malaysian descent; however people of Chinese, American, and Spanish origin may also be native to the Philippines.

• Filipinos are predominately Roman Catholic (about 83%), with smaller percentages of Protestant, Islamic, Buddhist, and other faiths. Currently, there are approximately 1.4 million Filipinos in the United States, representing about 20% of the total Asian-American population.

• While Tagalog is the official national language of the Philippines, approximately 85% of young and middle-aged Filipinos speak English.

• Some Filipinos tend to avoid direct expression of disagreement and males may hesitate to verbalize emotions.

• Direct eye contact has various connotations and may sometimes be avoided. They may be reluctant to share feelings and emotions in a group setting, especially when both men and women are present.

• It may be viewed as inappropriate or disrespectful for a health care worker to address an elderly Filipino by first name only.

• There tends to be a strong sense of family; it’s not uncommon for nuclear and extended family members to visit hospitalized relatives. Family members may want to participate in caring for a hospitalized relative and be involved in discharge planning.

• A Filipino child is often taught at a very early age to respect elders with education being highly valued.

• Religious beliefs may dictate what foods are eaten (for example, Filipino Catholics may avoid eating meat during Lent, etc.).

• Traditional foods include rice, fish, and vegetables. Diet tends to be high in salt. It is customary for some to include both “hot” and “cold” foods in cooking, such as mixing beans (considered a hot food) with green vegetables (considered cold foods) regardless of how they are prepared.

• Many attribute illness to the will of God and cope by praying. Some believe illness is caused by natural causes, while others believe that illness is caused by supernatural causes, or a combination of both.

• Some may practice folk medicine along with more standard medical treatments. Three concepts underlie many Filipino health beliefs and practices: flushing, heating, and protection. It is thought that flushing keeps the body free from debris, heating maintains a balanced internal temperature, and protection guards the body from outside influences.

• There is a higher incidence of hypertension, diabetes, and lactose intolerance in Filipino-Americans.

Reference: Transcultural Nursing