



Symptoms Other Than Pain

Table 6. Death Rituals and Customs Observed by Various Cultural Groups.

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
American Indians (p. 17-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family may hug, touch, sing, stay close to the dead person Wailing, shrieking and other outward signs of grieving many occur, a startling contrast in demeanor compared to pre death display of positive attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> turning or flexing the body, sweetgrass smoke or other purification family may want to stay with the body and have individual visitation some want the body to rest at place of death for 36 hours to allow the soul to depart women may want to prepare and dress the body some do not allow the mortuary to prepare the body, the family wraps the body for burial some avoid contact with the dead person and his/her possessions others want all possessions including collected hair and nail clippings autopsy not desired hair cutting may be done as a sign of mourning a loved one's death
Arab Americans (p. 31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family does not anticipate or grieve for dying person before death Inform head of family of death; he will decide how to inform rest of family Prepare private room for family to meet and grieve together Arab Christians may request a minister be present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Imam reads the Koran after a person dies, not before or during the process Grief is open, loud, uncontrollable Special rituals followed, such as washing the body and all its orifices May not allow organ donation Autopsy problematic; presentation of request should allow family the option of refusing
African Americans (p. 39-40)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family may hug, touch, and be close to family and friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report death to oldest family member, spouse or parent Open and public emotions expected after

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May get agitated or emotional when anxious • Person may be brought to hospital when death is imminent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • death • May believe that death at home brings bad luck • Prefer to have body cleaned by professionals • Cremation avoided • Organ and blood donations not common
Brazilian Americans (p. 50)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent immigrants may not be familiar with US procedures; explain to family • Inform family members and offer to call priest or chaplain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family may want extended visitation • No specific good-bye rituals, but may involve kissing or caressing the dead person • Family chooses clothing • Organ donation not common • Autopsy not common, but family may allow if information is provided
Cambodian (Khmer) Americans (p. 60)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform parents or older children, and encourage them to call other family members, monks and religious laypersons • Monks and laypersons recite prayers • Family members are present • May burn incense • Family is quiet and passive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family, monks and laypersons may wash the body • Body of dead person is shrouded in white cloth • Mourners wear white • Prayers by monks on the night of death are important • Sorrow has a limited phase • Unlikely to allow organ donation • Unlikely to agree to autopsy • Cremation preferred
Central American (p. 70)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May want priest to administer sacrament • Eldest male should be informed of impending death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members prepare body for burial • Family members must say goodbye to dead person • Organ donation acceptable if body treated with respect • Autopsy may be accepted if family members involved in the decision • Mayan families may not accept autopsy • Cremation not common
Chinese Americans (p. 78)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and dying person may not want to talk about death • May believe that dying at home is bad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special amulets and cloths may be brought to place on the body • Family may prefer to bathe the dead person • Organ donation not common • Autopsies may not be allowed

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
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Cubans and Cuban Americans (pp. 96-97)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital preferred as place to die • Have family contact dying person's church • Entire family expected to visit, insist on being present at all times until death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No special preparation of the body • Organ donation not common • Autopsy not common
Filipino Americans (pp. 120-121)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify head of family away from dying person's room • Notify Catholic chaplain • DNR decision will be decided by entire family • Families may start praying or crying loudly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May ask for religious medallions, beads, or other objects to be near the dead person • Death is spiritual event • Family may want to wash body • All family members say good-bye to dead person before the body is taken to a morgue • May not allow organ donation • May not allow autopsy • Cremation is not common
Gypsies (pp. 132-133)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform eldest member of family and ask for help with relatives • Critical issue is presence of family • Family may want priest present • Family wants window open to let spirit leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family wants window open after death to allow spirit to leave • Grown children responsible for preparing funeral arrangements • May want religious object, favorite food, or personal object in room • Older female relative at window at all times to keep out Night Spirits and allow dead person's spirit to be released • Moment of death very significant; predicts what will happen in the next year • Last words very significant • Relatives want dead person embalmed immediately • Sit with dead person night and day until burial • Organ donation not accepted • Autopsy not common; eldest in authority

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
		decides
Haitian Americans (p. 149-150)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elder kinsman of dying person makes death arrangements • Family prays, cries hysterically • Family members bring religious medallions, pictures of saints, or fetishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body kept until all family members can be present for service • Family member gives final bath to dead person • Organ donation not encouraged • Autopsy requested if foul play or unnatural death suspected, to insure the person is really dead
Hmong (pp. 163-164)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members dress dying person in finest traditional Hmong clothing • Elders of family/clan make decisions concerning dying person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not remove amulets from body • Body usually prepared for burial by family at funeral home • Family may ask that hard objects, including metal plates, bullets, shrapnel, be removed from body • Person not buried with buttons, zippers, or metal closures; no metal objects or jewelry • Specific rituals performed in funeral home after death • Organ donation not accepted traditionally • Autopsy not accepted traditionally
Iranian (p. 175)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify head of family or spokesperson first • DNR decision generally not difficult • Family members around at all times • Family may pray or cry softly with dying person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some family may wish to visit the body • Family may decide to wash the body • Body not viewed after washing; no embalming • Cremation not common • Organ donation acceptable; discuss with spokesperson of family • Autopsy acceptable if reasoning explained
Japanese Americans (pp. 185-186)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spouse or eldest son or daughter is contact • DNR is decided by entire family • Family members present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleanliness important in preparing body of the dead person • Stress maintenance of dignity and modesty for viewing the body • Cremation acceptable • Organ donation acceptable to some Japanese Americans

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autopsy acceptable to some Japanese Americans
Korean (p. 198)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spokesperson should be informed of imminence of death • Family members will prepare dying person for death 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mourning, crying, chanting, incense burning, praying may all be done by family members • Family spends time with the dead person • Cleansing of body may or may not be requested • Organ donation not accepted • Autopsy accepted if sudden death occurs and reason not known
Mexican American (p. 213)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended family members obligated to visit dying person • Spirit may get “lost” in hospital and not return home • Prayers at bed of dying person • Wailing is acceptable as a sign of respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death important spiritual event • Extended family may help prepare body • Family says good-bye before dead person is taken to the morgue • Organ donation not accepted • Autopsy must be decided by entire family, usually not accepted
Puerto Rican (pp. 231-233)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify family spokesperson away from public areas • Priest/clergy present • Family members in room around the clock • Spiritual leaders expected at last minute of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family touches and kisses dead person before the body is taken from hospital • Loud crying or talking, or physical illness caused by death very common • Dead person may be buried within 24 hours, or may be postponed until essential family members (siblings and children) can be present • Family leader expected to contact essential family members required to be present at death and burial • Organ donation seen as act of goodwill; meeting recipient is important • Autopsy seen as violation of body; if needed, obtain authorization from family leaders
Russian (p. 245-246)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform head of family of imminent death • Ask family about notifying spiritual leader (rabbi, priest, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on religion, family members may want to wash and dress the dead person • Some Jewish families ask that severed limbs be sewed back on the dead person • Cremation unacceptable to most Russian Christians

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> chaplain) • DNR decision made by family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organ donation not common • Autopsy not common unless it is absolutely necessary
Samoan (p. 258)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dying person and family prefer to be told prognosis early • Ministers, church members, family members provide support to dying person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members prefer to prepare body • Organ donation not considered • Autopsy generally not considered; consult family spokesperson • Cremation very rare
South Asians (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh) (pp. 273-274)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly preferred that dying person remain at home • Family members and relatives must be called and allowed to stay at bedside • Muslim families may have special prayers • May require spiritual leader • Family members express grief openly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hindu and Sikh: body washed by close family members, dressed in new clothes, and prepared for cremation • Hindu: saves ashes of body to throw in Ganges • Hindu: mourns 40 days • Body, arms, legs are straightened, eyes closed, toes joined with bandage, body covered with sheet • Body then washed ritually and buried as soon as possible after death • Muslim: mourn 3 days but hold periodic memorial gatherings • Organ donation not allowed • Autopsy usually not allowed
Vietnamese Americans (p. 285-286)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform head of family of death • DNR decision made by entire family • Priest, family, monk, pray in room • May use religious medallions or incense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family decides whether to wash body • Rituals take place in room • Organ donation not allowed • Autopsy not allowed unless entire family agrees • Cremation common among Buddhist Vietnamese Americans
West Indians (p. 298-299)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close friends/family members will gather at side of dying person • Surviving partner should be of death, best in the presence of adult children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not customary for family to care for or prepare body • Organ donation not common • Autopsy not common

Cultural Group	Ritual or Custom at Time of Death	Ritual or Custom Immediately After Death
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="440 275 721 369">• Family members choose to be alone with dead person 	

NOTE: For a more complete explanation of diversity among ethnic and cultural groups as it affects nursing care, see Juliene G. Lipson, Suzanne L. Dibble, and Pamela A. Minarik, *Culture and Nursing Care: A Pocket Guide* (San Francisco: USCF Nursing Press, 1996). Material in Table 7 adapted from this Guide.

Table 7. Spiritual and Religious Beliefs Influencing Death Customs

Spiritual or Religious Group	Preferences Associated with Dying and Death
Adventist (Seventh Day) (p. B-2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No restrictions on medications, blood, blood products • May include prayer and anointing with oil • Prefer prolonging life but may allow death • Euthanasia not practiced • Autopsy, organ donation acceptable • Disposal of body and burial are individual decisions
American Indian (p. B-5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beliefs and practices vary widely • Body may be prepared for burial by family or tribal members • Spiritual or religious practitioners may not have identification as member of the clergy, but is presented as cousin or uncle • Need time and space for rituals, chants and prayers
Buddhist (p. B-7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dying person’s state of mind at moment of death influences rebirth • Many diverse rituals including last rite chanting at bedside, family members remaining with body • Cremation often preferred • Pregnant women should avoid funerals • Priest, monk or layperson may carry out traditions
Catholic (p. B- 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permissible to refuse treatment that carries risk or would prolong a burdensome life • Euthanasia forbidden • Sacrament of the Sick [Extreme Unction] mandatory • Organ or body donation allowed
Christian Scientist (p. B-10-11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not likely to see medical help to prolong life • Euthanasia contrary to teachings • Organ or body donation not usual • Burial or disposal of body decided by family
Hindu (p. B-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death is opposite of birth; a passage • Belief in rebirth • Person should be allow to die peacefully • Euthanasia produces negative karma for participants • Organ donation and autopsy acceptable • Prayers and chants by family, friends and priests before and after death • Expressive, outward display of grief • Cremation common
Islam (p. B-13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confession of sins and begging forgiveness must occur in presence of family before death

Spiritual or Religious Group	Preferences Associated with Dying and Death
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to follow five steps of burial procedure • Euthanasia prohibited • Right to die not accepted • Autopsy permitted for medical or legal reasons
Jehovah's Witnesses (p. B-15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No last rites • Members of congregation and elders visit to pray for person and read scripture • Burial determined by individual preference/local custom • Euthanasia forbidden • Organ or body donation forbidden • Autopsy permitted if legally required
Jewish (p. B-17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All body parts must be buried together • Body is never left alone; <i>mitzvah</i> sitting done until burial • Body may be ritually washed after death by members of Ritual Burial Society • Cosmetic restoration or embalming discouraged • Burial as soon as possible or within 48 hours • Cremation not appropriate • Euthanasia prohibited • Autopsy permitted if legally required • Initial mourning period is called <i>shiva</i>, a 7-day period except for sabbath and holy days • Mourning extends over a year and includes many practices
Mormon (p. B-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burial in "temple clothes" is usual • Promote peaceful and dignified death if inevitable • Euthanasia not practiced • Organ donation individual choice • Autopsy permitted with consent of next of kin
Protestant (p. B-20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organ donation, autopsy, burial/cremation usually individual decisions • Prolonging life may have restrictions • Euthanasia policy varies with group

NOTE: For a more complete explanation of diversity among spiritual and religious beliefs as it affects nursing care, see Juliene G. Lipson, Suzanne L. Dibble, and Pamela A. Minarik, *Culture and Nursing Care: A Pocket Guide* (San Francisco: USCF Nursing Press, 1996). Material in Table 8 adapted from this Guide.