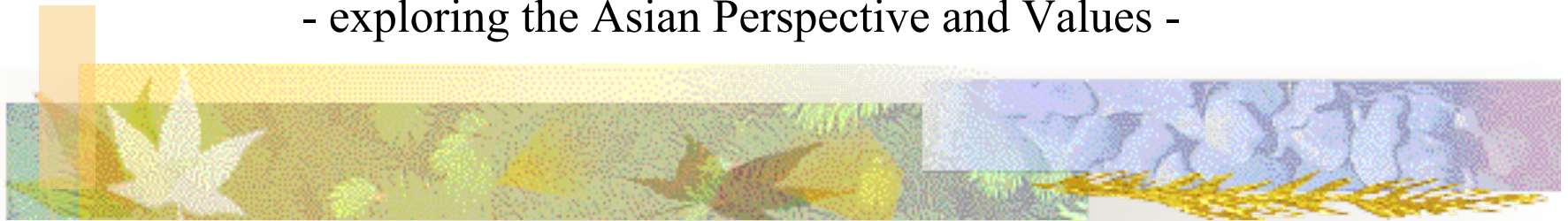


NY Coalition for Asian American Mental Health
- Cultural Aspects of Grief Among Asian Americans -
October 22, 2010

Living and Dying Well Together
- exploring the Asian Perspective and Values -



Kei Okada, MDiv, BCC
Spiritual Care Counselor / Chaplain
Visiting Nurse Service of New York Hospice Care www.vnsny.org
Email: kei.okada@vnsny.org kokada24@gmail.com



How **Hospice** is different from other health care services

Providing interdisciplinary team support of **palliative care** rather than cure of the disease

Treating the **person** rather than the disease
(understanding the background and what's going on with the person)

Focused on the **quality of life** rather than the length of life

Supporting **the family and the “care unit”** as well as the patient
24 hours/day.

“Hospice Care is the aggressive comfort care”

Teresa Rando, MD



Suffering = Total Pain (Cicely Saunders, 1967)

Physical Pain Disease symptoms, Side effect ...

Social Pain Loss of one's **relational/social roles**,
Family conflict, **Financial** concerns ...

Psychological Pain Anxiety, Fear, Anger, Grief, Depression ...

Spiritual Pain Difficulty accepting the mortality
Lack/Loss of self-worth/acceptance
Loss of meaning and purpose of life *"Life is over"*
Meaning of suffering (fear of punishment & afterlife)
Sense of guilt, **Separation** from the divine, **Loss of faith**
Loss of ability to participate in a religious practice/
custom/community
Need of **forgiveness and/or reconciliation**
Hopelessness, Despair



Spiritual Care?

- Spiritual Care Counselor 心靈補導師、牧師
- Spirituality 靈性 氣息
 - Religious practice, community 宗教、信仰、神仏觀
 - World-view, Nature-view, Life-view 世界觀、自然觀、生命觀
 - Source of Strength, Dignity 氣 尊嚴 道
 - Source of Peace, Hope 平安 和 中庸 望



HOSPICE

< derived from Latin: *hospitium*'s **“Guesthouse”**

Hospitality

It is a hospitable place where the travelers can find rest.

We accompany our patient's journey of searching and finding his/her own “home”.

*It is an **environment** we create where our “guests” (patients and families) can feel safe to openly explore both their deepest fear and the deepest hope/yearnings.*



Palliative Care integrates
Civilization 文明 and Culture 文化 *(We need both!)*

文明 Civilization **to make our body comfortable**

- pain control, symptom management
- recorded in the charts daily
- developed by the economy

What to Do the tasks to accomplish, the words to speak

文化 Culture **to make our soul comfortable**

- understanding and caring the individually unique “home culture” of pain

How to Be the caring presence, the behaviors/tone in speech



Caring Approach

■ **Empathic Presence**

- **How to BE** a Connecting, Understanding Presence

Be Mindful & Non-Anxious

as much as you are aware of your own fear, wounds etc.
in all-accepting compassion

■ **Silent reverence of “not knowing” (about the mystery of life)**

- **Envision an inviting, hospitable “family” space, open to receive the stories & meetings as Gifts**
- Let each encounter with the wonders and mystery of life **renew** yourself with the new experience – including unanswered questions.



■ **Asian values**

- **Societal Family-based self-identity** (vs. individual right)
 - **Fear/Guilt, loss of self-worth in being a burden on the family**
- **Dignity of Bearing Pain including Grief, Virtue of Self-Sacrifice**
 - **Emotional expression is seen as a weakness.**
 - **Accepting help is seen as a weakness.**
- **Belief in the spiritual influence of our language**
 - **Talk about illness, death, dying, grief is seen as a negative influence upon our life's fate, fortune or destiny**



Spiritual Shifts of our cultural Paradigm - *possible?*

Image of our illness, death, loss and bereavement

Burdensome?

What about seeing these experiences as part of our nature and inter-dependence? (beyond dependence vs. independence)

Image of our emotional expression as a mutual “Gift” for our growth

Emotional “intelligence” as a mutually experienced gift which enriches our life of understanding and supporting one another (beyond the positive vs. the negative)

Belief in the spiritual influence of our language

“Word” 言 originally means, “Heart which comes out of our mouth”


When is our talk about illness, death, dying, or grief “good”

Spoken from a “good heart”? To see such an open talk as a good spiritual influence?



■ Spiritual Shifts of our cultural Paradigm

- We are all **“wounded healers”** - not black and white separate entities such as “healer & patient”, “the healthy & the unhealthy”, “the strong & the weak” etc. The hurting dimension of myself is a “patient”; the healing dimension of each person (even with illness, grief, etc.) is a “healer.” We are **human** in having both sides.
- How can we enter into the **sense of the person’s soul**? How can we **tune in, breathe together**, and participate in the shared image?
- How can we be **fully present** with the person, whose history and the sense of time are different from ours?



“Time is too slow for those who wait;
too swift for those who fear;
too long for those who grieve;
too short for those who rejoice.
But for those who love,
Time is Eternity.
Hours fly, flowers die,
new days, new ways pass by.
Love stays.”

- Henry Van Dyke

**How much can we get closer to the bereaved’s
sense of time?**

**How can we celebrate the lasting substance of the
bereaved family’s love for the deceased?**




Art of Caring – Finding the Beauty

- 藥 medicine: “*pharmacon*” in ancient Greek
 - 2 meanings co-exist: “cure” and “poison”

- 中庸

Where is **your sense of “beauty”** in the **right balance of the light and the shadow** of what you see happening?



*“All human beings are inextricably interconnected.
I am because we are.
We can be human only in community, in peace.”*

- Desmond Tutu

**Identity is not an individual thing,
but what we construct together.
We hold one another in particular identity.
I hold my identity
as long as others hold me in the identity as well,
not my thinking, not my self-determination.**

Everything is GIVEN for us to be called to respond.
**How do I respond to this person and situation
as part of the kind of community I believe in?**

- BBC RADIO 4 Podcast “Beyond Belief” June 15, 2009



