Traditional Healers
Project
Sutter–Yuba Mental Health Services
Hmong Outreach Program
(Olivehurst, CA)

Presented by Mai Y. Vang, LCSW
OVERVIEW

• The Hmong: Understanding how culture defines wellness

• Sutter Yuba Mental Health Hmong Outreach Program:
  1. MHSA CSS Plan: Hmong Outreach Center
  2. MHSA PEI Plan: Traditional Healers Project
  3. Promising Practice Program
  4. MHSA Innovative Plan: A Culturally Competent Collaborative to Address Serious Mental Illness in the Hmong Population
WHO ARE THE HMONG?

• Hmong in the US are refugees from Southeast Asia

• Hmong are a distinct group of people, meaning they have their own language + culture

• The Laotion and Mien are close neighbors, but are not the same as Hmong
HMONG POPULATION WORLDWIDE

- China 6,000,000
- Vietnam 787,604
- Laos 315,000
- Thailand 124,000
- Burma 2-3,000
- **U.S. 250,000**
- France 8,000
- Australia 1,800
- French Guyana 500-1,000

2004 Diaspora Estimates from Professor Nicholas Tapp, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
Why is it important?

- Acculturation
- Trust
- Help Seeking Behaviors
HMONG POPULATION in US

- California—91,224
  - Fresno—31,771
  - Sacramento—26,996
  - Merced—7,254
  - Yuba—*3,392; Hmong community estimates closer to 5,000
- Minnesota—66,181
- Wisconsin—49,240

2009 Census
2000 Census, these people identified Hmong as their primary language
BELIEFS

• Focus more on traditional Hmong today

• Explore how these beliefs impact their views on what constitutes health and wellness
• There is no distinction between physical health, mental health, or spiritual health

• You are either healthy or not. You see your traditional healer and if that doesn’t work, you MIGHT see your family doctor
• Aches, pains, depression, and other serious mental illnesses are caused by having lost souls

• Souls may be lost through:

1. Sudden fright (loud noise, fall)
2. Fear or too much grief
3. Captured by an evil spirit
4. Unhappy soul trying to transfer to another
• Natural/nonspiritual causes, including environment and aging

• Spiritual/religious causes— including evil spirits, ancestor, and nature spirits can cause illness when offended
• Curses: people who have been wronged can curse wrongdoer and cause illness

• Violating Taboos
MENTAL HEALTH BELIEFS

• There is no concept of Mental Health

• The only understanding they have of mental health is that it is for “crazy” people

• Mental health conditions are genetic; therefore, immediate family, extended family, and clan are “crazy” too
MENTAL HEALTH BELIEFS

• Don’t tell mental health professionals too much information or they will lock you up with the other crazies.

• Young people shouldn’t need mental health services: they are still young and should not have stress and/or xiam hlwb (brain-damaged, poor memory & concentration, memory loss).
MENTAL HEALTH BELIEFS

• If you or your children receive mental health services, they will not be able to have a good job

• If you take some psychiatric medicine, it might help you; but if you take too much (like how it is prescribed) it will make you crazy and more ill
MENTAL HEALTH BELIEFS

• The mental health facility is referred to as:

1. *tsev nyuaj siab* (the depression house)
2. *tsev vwm* (the crazy house), or
3. *tsev xiam hlwb* (the brain-damaged house)
DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Shaman

Training
Must be chosen, trained by shaman master & shaman spirit;
Some shamans can perform all the healing listed later

Specialty
Spiritual Healing
DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

**Herbalist**

**Training**
Can be learned; must be chosen by herb spirits for magic herbal healing

**Specialty**
Herbal & magic herb healing
**Witchdoctors**

**Training**
Can be learned; Some witchdoctors are herbalists. Some people are more inclined to learn than others.

**Specialty**
Magical Healing
**Masseuse**

**Training**
Can be learned; must be chosen by spirits for magic healing

**Specialty**
Muscle/Pain
Midwife

Training
Can be learned

Specialty
Prenatal
• Treatment for common ailments include cupping, spooning, pinching, or coining on the neck, shoulder, back, chest, forearms (may result in unusual physical marks like these)
You want to ask me about having my children? I don’t like to talk about it, but I will tell you something. My first child, he is gone now. We had to leave our village in Laos, and the spirits took him when we crossed the river to go to Thailand. I was so careful while I was pregnant, too; I never went near a river or landslide where the spirits like to be to avoid them striking me or my baby. I never carried heavy things or reached up high. But when we had to leave our village and go to the refugee camp, the spirits struck him anyway.
Scenario

I was not allowed to have a proper burial ceremony for him, even though he was old enough, because it would have taken too long, and we had to keep going. So my son’s spirit is still wandering at the river; it can’t get permission to reenter the womb. This makes me sad all the time, and I cry.

That was a long time ago though. My next two children, they were born in the refugee camp. They don’t remember very much, and I tell them it is better that way because the camp was such a bad place – we were so sad to leave our village and in the camp, it is very crowded and dirty. It is better for them here, but I wish they could grow up in our village.
I had my next three children here in America. My last one, she is just a couple months old. If it were up to me, I would be finished having children, but my husband, he wants more. The spirits struck my first son, and all I have now is daughters. So I need a son and many children to take care of us when we are old. Now I am so tired with this last baby though, and I just to die.

My friends and I, we don’t talk about it much, but sometimes a young woman will say, “I don’t understand why I have very short temper.”
Scenario

Then an older woman will tell her, “We all women. We all wear the same shoe.” I still think it’s nice though when a young woman says she feels upset and she doesn’t understand because that is how I feel, too.

Most of these women though, they have babies, and they feel better in a couple weeks. Me though, I have felt sick for a very long time. This is because my spirit has left me, and it cannot get back.

When I was pregnant with this baby, I was so careful, but then I had a very long labor, and the baby did not want to come out.
Scenario

My husband took me to the hospital and they told me they were going to make me fall asleep so they could cut the baby out. My English is not very good, and I don’t understand why they had to do this, but my husband called our house and had my father ask the ancestors to guide me through this journey I was going to take.

But the ancestors must not have been listening because when the doctors cut me open, one of my souls escaped. They told my husband he could not be with me, so he could not tell my soul to come with me to the recovery room. So when I woke up in a different room, my soul was lost.
Now I always have bad dreams that I am wandering far away, and I cannot find where I am going. These dreams wake me up, and then I cannot sleep anymore. In the day, I cry because my soul is lost. I cannot even look at my baby, so my family took her away to take care of her. They know that something is wrong, but what can they do?
Hmong Narrative

Based on an interview with Dia Vang: “Childbirth and soul loss: the case of a Hmong woman” by Rice, Ly & Lumley; “When the baby falls! The cultural construction of miscarriage among Hmong women in Australia by Rice; and “Death in birth: The cultural construction of stillbirth, neonatal death, and maternal death among Hmong women in Australia” by Rice
MHSA CSS PLAN

• Development of the ‘Hmong Outreach Center’

1. Eliminate Stigma—name change and facility change
2. Bilingual/Bicultural staff
3. Facility located proximity to majority of population
4. Flexible hours to bridge different concepts of time and way of being
5. Culturally Responsive Services
• The Traditional Healers Project’

1. How do we get people from point A (traditional healers) to point B (us, Mental Health)? And how do we get them to be able to distinguish the type of help?

   • Emergency Physical Health Needs
   • Non Emergency Physical Health Needs
   • Mental Health Needs
   • Non Emergency Mental Health Needs
   • AOD services

2. Merced’s Partners in Healing Project (Cross training of Mercy Hospital Staff and Hmong Shamans)
MHSA PEI PLAN

• The Traditional Healers Project

3. Meetings/Dialogue with key people: Traditional Healers Focus Group, SYMHS Admin & Psychiatrists, Rideout Hospital

4. Agreement on training modules and direction of Traditional Healers Project (piggy back on what’s familiar to the community by keeping hospital tour modules in PIH, add in modules that address local concerns, focus on Mental Health PEI)
TRADITIONAL HEALERS PROJECT

1. Bridging the cultural gap: Formal/Informal cross training of Hmong Traditional Healers and Western Providers
2. Training of Traditional Healers on Symptom Identification and Referral
3. Systems Improvement—Hospital P&P, Mental Health Inpatient P&P
# TRADITIONAL HEALERS PROJECT

## The Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Health</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Spiritual Health</th>
<th>Systems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ambulance/911 Emergency Training</td>
<td>• What is mental health &amp; prevention?</td>
<td>• Shamans/Other Traditional Healers Around the World</td>
<td>• Multiple Focus Groups</td>
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<td>• What It Takes to Become a Doctor</td>
<td>• What It Takes to Become a Specialized Doctor (psychiatrist)</td>
<td>• Sikhism &amp; Temple Tour</td>
<td>• Project Rules &amp; Expectations</td>
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<td>• Hospital Education &amp; Tours (6)--ROER</td>
<td>• Psychiatric Emergency/5150</td>
<td>• Latino Traditional Healing</td>
<td>• Traditional Healing Ceremonies &amp; Law Enforcement</td>
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<td>• Yuba Sutter Hmong Community Wellness &amp; TB</td>
<td>• Mental Health Education and Tour (2)</td>
<td>• Animal Control: Raising and Use of Animal for Rituals</td>
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<td>• Alcohol and other Drugs</td>
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The Cross Trainings

1. Formal Training of SYMHS psychiatrists (2)
   - Hmong Clinical Staff & Hmong Traditional Healer

2. Informal cross training of leads/presenter at all training/tour modules
TRADITIONAL HEALERS PROJECT

Creating Culturally Responsive Systems

1. Local Hospital considering adopting similar policy to that of Mercy Hospital Merced

2. SYMHS Psychiatric Health Facility Policy & Procedure
POLICY: It is the policy of Sutter Yuba Mental Health Services (SYMHS) to ensure that Hmong patients in the Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF) have spiritual care available to them. In order to ensure a Hmong patient’s right to access their chosen spiritual healer or traditional healer, visitation for the purpose of support and/or providing a healing ceremony may be permitted.

PROCEDURE:

1. PHF Staff will coordinate or arrange the provision of a Hmong traditional healer visit when requested by a patient, a patient’s family member, or legal guardian. Patient, family members, and/or legal guardian will be informed that the services of a traditional healer should not conflict with one another, but work together to enhance mental health and well-being.

2. When the need for a traditional healer is identified, PHF staff will acknowledge the request and contact Hmong Outreach Staff to request assistance to coordinate a traditional healer visit with the patient.

3. Traditional Hmong rituals are allowed in the patient’s room with the following recommendations:
   a. If there is another patient in the room, PHF staff will inform him/her of the ritual and ask for his/her consent.
   b. If the other patient does not consent to the ritual performed in his/her room, arrangements will be made for Hmong patients to be moved to another location for the ritual.

4. PHF staff will document in the patient’s chart the request and intervention that has been coordinated.

5. The following rituals may be performed:
   a. Tying a string around the hand or feet to bless and protect the patient to maintain the soul.
   b. Using a cup of water, blessing the water with a short spell (consisting of a low chant), and then spraying the water on the patient, on the patient’s bed, and/or in the patient’s room to protect the patient and rid evil spirits around.

6. If a traditional healer recommends other rituals or ceremonies, then approval will be negotiated with appropriate PHF staff, Hmong Outreach staff, and other necessary department administrators.
### Traditional Healer's Project Evaluations Summary

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<th></th>
<th>1 (Agree)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 (Neutral)</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (Disagree)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a result of the trainings, I have a better understanding of the diagnosis and treatment processes involved in the medical model approach.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would recommend the trainings to another traditional healer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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#### Symptoms for:

| Non-Emergency Mental Health | sadness, suicidal ideation, depression, family stress; stomach pains, thoughts about dying, crying all the time; thoughts about dying; crying spells, feels like dying, depression; acting crazy; angry, irritable; doesn’t want to do anything; hard to talk to; different from normal | Refer to: Hmong Outreach Center - Mai Vang; Primary care physician or to mental health: Paul Moun; Pavi Her |
| Non-Emergency Health Care | headaches, stomach pains, physical pain; headache, dizzy, flu, cough, sore throat; small physical health issues, burns, pale, tired, complaints of pain; mild headache; body pains; bloated; chest pains, inability to eat or drink due to stomach pains; always asking for pain meds | Family Doctor: primary care physician |
| Alcohol, Drugs, and other Addictions | irritable, angry outbursts, yellowing teeth, weight loss, eyes are different, sleeping all day; racing thoughts, don’t get along with anyone, don’t listen, angry, may be aggressive and break things, pale/pain, yellowing/rotting teeth, smells different; homicidal thoughts, bad teeth; weird eyes, bad body odor; “mean” facial expression, change in attitude, looks different; darker/paler skin, teeth discoloration, doesn’t look normal; watery eyes, runny nose | Mental Health at the main number: Mai Vang, Paul Moun; refer to ER, call 9-1-1; |
| Emergency Physical Health | major health issues, can’t breathe, severe injuries, broken bones, heart attack; severe pain, bad burns, broken bones, appendicitis, knife cut and lots of bleeding; stroke, extreme headaches; can’t get up, extreme stomach pains; extreme flu symptoms; excessive vomiting, dizziness, fainting; fever, unable to get up, tired all the time, pale | Call 9-1-1 or go to Emergency Room in Rideout |
| Emergency Mental Health | suicidal; sad and says he/she will kill him/herself, can’t talk them out of it; very sad, crying, acting out against others; angry outbursts; doesn’t listen, acting crazy, trying to hurt others; angry all the time, angry | Call Police to escort him/her to mental health; call 9-1-1; Mai Vang, Paul Moun; PEV |
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Promising Practices Program

1. Traditional Healers Phase II:
   • Supporting spiritual healing as prevention
   • Ongoing + additional cross trainings

2. Continue to build on Hmong cultural strengths and values as a way of reducing stigma
   • Increase activities that are familiar to the Hmong at the Hmong Center
   • Expand community garden
   • Bringing the community together to build Hmong hut in garden to promote wellness & familiarize new people to the Center
SYMHS Innovative Project: A Culturally Competent Collaborative to Address Serious Mental Illness in the Hmong Population

- Integrating Traditional Healing with current mental health services
- Funds to offset some of the costs associated with traditional healing ceremonies/rituals
- Staff to link clt to traditional healers and coordinate services
- TA from PPP
Thank you for your time and attendance!

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