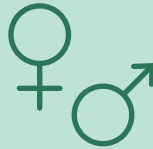


Cultural Sensitivity

There are **22 different Arab states** who are members of the Arab League and there is great diversity in their ethnicity, culture, and historical backgrounds. Therefore, the conceptualization of health and illness and the way in which Canadian health care services are perceived and accessed can vary among Arab patients.

For Arabs, interactions between men and women can only take place within the context of a family setting. Physical touch between genders is a very sensitive issue, even in a health care context.



When conducting a health service procedure that requires any exposure of the body, such as taking a blood sample, provide privacy so that no part of the body of a Muslim Arab woman is exposed to other patients or staff.

- * *Discussing beforehand what is required during an examination might reduce the anxiety of Arab patients, especially females.*
- * *If a female attendant is not available (doctor, nurse practitioner, or student), advise the patient beforehand. If appropriate, consider allowing a female family member to attend the examination or consultation.*

Arab cultural expression can be visible through dress. Both men and women may wear traditional clothing, which varies by region and by ethnicity.



Generally, women's garments are designed to avoid unwanted attention from men so even if they wear Western-style clothing, this is likely to cover most of their bodies and be loose fitting in order not to define the shape of the body. Some Muslim Arab women may also wear a hijab (head cover).

The type of dress of an Arab patient may assist you in understanding how to address him or her. The more traditional the dress, the more it is recommended to avoid touch even when welcoming the patient to your office (e.g. do not shake hands).

Immigration Experience

There have been two major waves of Arab immigration to Canada:

- Early immigrants from economically less-developed countries
- Post-World War II immigrants from decolonized Arab countries undergoing rapid socio-economic development and political turmoil.

Reasons for immigration vary from seeking refugee status due to instability in the Middle East to a need to escape poverty, along with the desire to have better educational and business opportunities.



feelings of hopelessness or avoidance

minimizing or denying the horrors of their war experience

Impact of Immigration on Health

Arab immigrants who have experienced war, dislocation, oppression, and/or torture in their country of origin often display symptoms related to PTSD.

Possible common causes for depression and stress among Arab patients are the challenges of everyday life in Canada such as the fast paced routine, and the formalized processes for business, finance, health, and government. Also, the change in social and economic status as some Arabs might have worked as professionals in their home countries, but are unable to find comparable employment in Canada.

Other Psychological Stressors:

- Separation from family (contributes to sense of isolation)
- News of conflict and insecurity in their home countries
- Complexity of the Canadian immigration and refugee process
- Discriminatory remarks, gestures, and behaviours, especially after 9-11

These stressors might result in a lack of trust in their personal environment.

Why was this infographic made?

This infographic is a response to concerns expressed by health care professionals in London regarding the lack of knowledge and understanding of health care practices of different regarding the lack of knowledge and understanding of health care practices of different immigrant groups. We hope that this information will provide health care professionals with an increased awareness of the factors which may affect how members of a different cultural group access and respond to health care services in our community.

Communication

Arabs are generally a warm and openly expressive people. They are very sensitive to non-verbal communication. It is common for them to use a loud voice to indicate that what they are saying is important, and this is generally not intended to be impolite. Arabs also use repetition to ensure they are clearly understood.



Arab patients generally have high respect for physicians and consider them authority figures. Treatment plans proposed by physicians are rarely challenged.

In contrast, some Arab patients may not confer the same professional status and respect to other health care professionals, such as nurses or interns. Some Arab patients may even be reluctant to comply with medical advice or treatments provided by health care professionals other than physicians.



Languages

- Classical Arabic
- Local Arabic dialects, and other languages:
 - Aramaic
 - Berber
 - Kurdish

Arabs believe procreation is the main goal of marriage. A couple is considered very fortunate if it is able to have many children, especially male ones. It might be challenging to talk with Arabs about contraceptive methods as this is not openly discussed in the community.

Instead of prescribing daily-dose contraceptives for unmarried Arab women, it is advisable to consider another choice of treatment, such as single dose injections.

Religion & Spirituality

Islam is the most common religion for Arabs. Devout Muslims pray five times a day. During the holy month of Ramadan, no food or drink is taken between sunrise and sunset. They also practice abstinence from pork and alcohol.

- * **Consider religious and cultural restrictions for Arab patients needing health corrective diets for diseases such as diabetes.**
- * **For Arab patients admitted to hospital, consider religious dietary restrictions for the food menu.**
- * **Some Muslim Arabs believe the left hand is unclean. Consider this when offering food or drink.**
- * **Although people in poor health are exempt from fasting, Muslim patients may refuse to take oral medication or IV solutions.**
- * **When death occurs, allow a male family member or Imam to be the person who handles the body. It might be appreciated by some orthodox Arabs if female health service provider avoided touching a deceased man.**

Fatalism is the belief that illness is punishment from God for not adhering to the principles of their faith. Good health and illness are considered part of a person's destiny. This impacts people's attitudes toward treatment for critical diseases, subsequent treatment plans, and health promotion programs in general.

Arabs usually avoid discussing death. Cancer is often referred to as "that" disease.

Friday is the Muslim holy day, so it is recommended to schedule appointments on alternative days.

Family

The word 'family' refers to extended family including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Extended family is the central feature of Arabs' social life and plays an important role in their health care needs.

It is very common for family or extended family members to accompany an Arab patient to an appointment. A husband might bring his wife to a consultation and speak for her even if she is able to speak English. Likewise, an older male family member may intervene and speak on behalf of another family member or advocate for him or her.

Some Arab patients may prefer test results be given to the closest male family member rather than the patient, especially if results indicate "bad news".

Arab communities have a high regard for their elders. They respect them for their knowledge, and value their opinion. Caring for elders is considered a religious duty. To seek help outside the family for an elderly person can be considered a failure in the responsibility to support and care for them.



Some Arabs may be offended by questions related to premarital sex and pregnancy as this may cast doubts on their family's honour. **Marriage is highly valued and virginity before marriage is viewed as sacred.**

Premarital sex is shameful and it can have serious consequences for the family at large. Pregnancy out of wedlock is considered unacceptable and abortion is taboo.

An Arab couple that has difficulty conceiving may experience stress. It is culturally inconceivable that the cause of infertility could be the husband so the wife is usually blamed. Both partners might resist the suggested treatment program if there is a diagnosis of infertility for the male partner.

Child bearing is considered the wife's responsibility. Arab men do not usually accompany their wives in the labour room. After birth, female members of the extended family are very involved in the support of the new family.



Alternative Treatments

Alternative treatments are widely used, sometimes in conjunction with Western medical treatment. These include:

- An Arab who is ill might first turn to family members (especially elders) for support
- Wearing amulets, burning incense, prayer with the Qur'an or Bible.
 - Some remedies could result in contraindications to prescribed medicine.
- More intrusive traditional methods include bleeding to lower the blood pressure, burning with hot metal to reduce sciatic or gastric pain, cupping to alleviate back pain and bronchitis, and wrapping a newborn with several blankets to straighten the back bone.

