

Cultural Awareness to Help While Serving Native Veterans

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Presenter:

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Moderator:

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Outline of Power Point

- ▶ Brief Overview of Office of Rural Health's Native Domain
- ▶ Native Veterans and their communities
- ▶ Cultural Aspects of work with Native Peoples
- ▶ Cultural Aspects of work with Native Veterans
- ▶ Collaboration with Traditional Medicine



Native Veterans and their communities

Diversity of Native Communities

- ▶ 4,222,760 American Indians and Alaska Natives and 909,770 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. and its territories (US Census 2007)
- ▶ 560+ federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages
- ▶ 245 non-Federally recognized tribes many who are recognized by their States and are seeking Federal recognition
- ▶ 28% of American Indian and Alaska Natives 5 years old or older speak a language other than English at home



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Repository: National Museum of the American Indian.

US Census Map



Native Americans Share a Proud Warrior Tradition

- ▶ Native Americans enroll in the armed services at a higher rate than any other ethnic population
- ▶ Today over 346,623 veterans identify themselves as AI/AN (US Census 2010)
- ▶ 38% rural/highly rural, proportionately more than other racial/ethnic groups



Challenges for Native American Veterans

- Disproportionately impacted by military services
 - Higher Rates of PTSD due to higher trauma exposure
 - Common medical co-occurring illnesses
- Rural Location
 - Availability of specialized health care services is scarce
 - Difficult to recruit providers
 - Cultural access barriers
- Acquiring “culturally competent” providers within a Native community is an even greater challenge



Cultural aspects of work with Native Peoples

Traditional Native American Values

Dominant Society Values	Native-American Traditional Values
Self is the priority = Take care of #1	Tribe and extended family first, before self
Prepare for tomorrow	Today (is a good day)
Time (linear; use every minute)	Time – a right time, a right place, non-linear
Youth (value rich, young, beautiful)	Age (knowledge, wisdom)
Compete to “get ahead”	Cooperate
Be aggressive	Be patient
Speak up	Listen (and you’ll learn)
Take and save	Give and share
Conquer nature	Live in harmony (with all things)
Skepticism and logical thinking valued	Great mystery – the intuitive honored

** Wounded Spirits, Ailing Hearts. PTSD and the Legacy of War Among American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans. [Independent Study] Produced with the National Center for PTSD by the Department of Veterans Affairs VA Employee Education System . Release Date: October 2000.

Traditional Native American Values

Dominant Society Values	Native-American Traditional Values
Self is more important than group	Humility
Religion is a part of life	A spiritual life (religion not “separate”)
Be a critical thinker	Don’t criticize your people
Live with your mind	Live with your hands – manual activity is sacred
Orient yourself to a house and job	Orient yourself to the land
You’re in America: speak English!	Cherish your own language and speak it when possible
Discipline your own children	Children are a gift of the Great Spirit to be shared with others
Have a rule for every contingency	Few rules are best, loose written and flexible
Have instruments judge for you	Judge things for yourself

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Understanding Native Culture



- ▶ Diversity of culture between and within communities
- ▶ Individual community members hold multiple cultural identities
- ▶ Elders and Veterans accorded important status

Understanding Native Culture

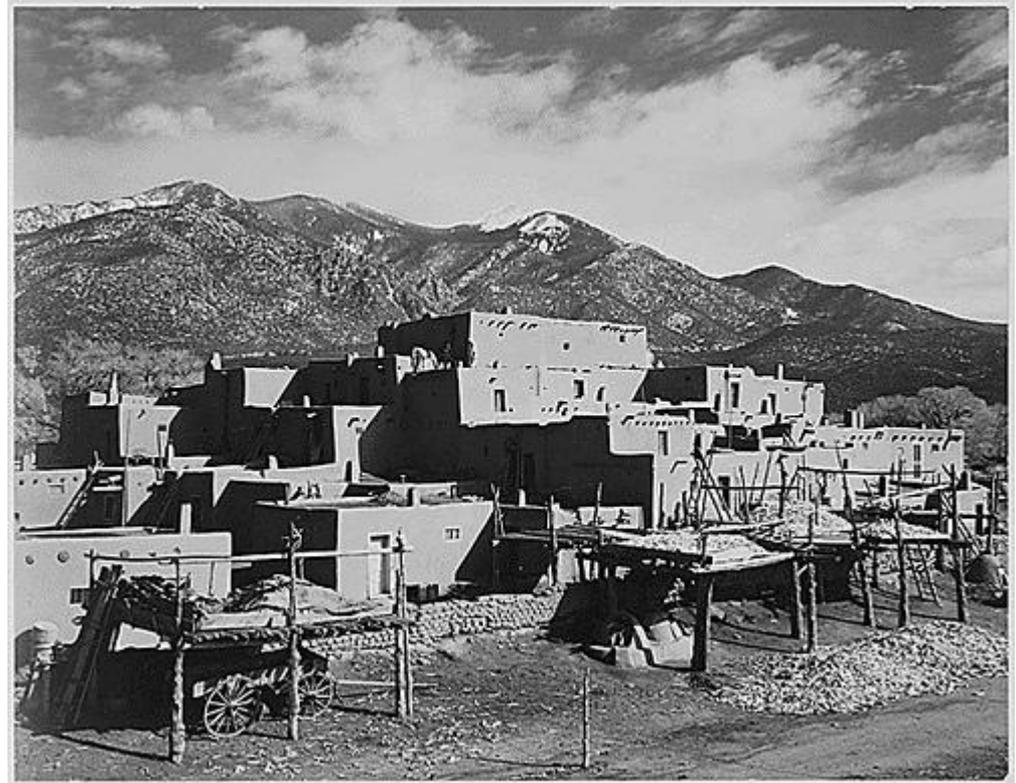
- ▶ Family Relearned
 - Family often includes grandparents, uncles/aunts, cousins and many others
 - Extended families in one household, grandparents often raise grandchildren
 - Sense of responsibility for providing for family (emotional, physical, \$)



Understanding Native Culture

▶ Community Revisited

- Community issues often have great effects on the individual
- Community problems are everybody's problems
- Community is family
- Strength and support can be found in family and community networks for individuals in distress



▶ Speech Pattern

- Adapt your tone of voice, volume, and speed of speech patterns to fit patients' communication style
- In many case speech may be:
 - Slower
 - Silence more acceptable
 - Learn not to interrupt
 - Let a story be finished

▶ Defer to Elders

▶ Respect narrative style of communication

- ▶ Eye contact varies in many cultures
- ▶ For many Native cultures, direct eye contact may be considered rude and disrespectful
 - Be familiar with community norms around eye contact
 - Be careful not to misinterpret lack of eye contact as a clinical sign (e.g., depression)

Importance of Body Language and Non-verbal Cues

▶ Personal Space

- Wide variation in comfort levels with interpersonal proximity
- Importance of body language and non-verbal communication

▶ Dress

- Dress (esp. in rural communities) is often casual. “Over-dressing” may create an the impression of aloofness



Cultural aspects of work with Native Veterans

What is Culturally Competent Care?

The culturally-competent caregiver acknowledges that societal differences impact patients' behavior, beliefs, and values and the caregiver works to incorporate these differences into individual patient's healthcare assessment, diagnosis, and treatment.



Tips on Incorporating Culturally-Competent Care with Native Populations

- ▶ Become familiar with local communication styles; modify yours as appropriate (slow down, listen, don't interrupt)
- ▶ Ask patients about their tribe, their family history
- ▶ Ask patients about their ideas of healthcare (personal practices, expectations)
- ▶ Rapport building may take longer
 - When establishing rapport, use issues that matter to the patient
- ▶ Understand the possibility of “system transference”

System Transference

- ▶ Transference in mental health is when experience with past relationships influences impressions of current relationships
- ▶ “System Transference” is when past experience with a system(s) (eg. VA, Federal Government) influences current feelings and reactions to a system(s)
 - If past history is positive then more trust and optimism in interfacing with current system
 - If past history is negative then more distrust and pessimism in interfacing with system

System Transference Historical Context

- ▶ Community
 - History of genocide, warfare and disease
 - Broken Treaties
 - Reservation Policy
 - Boarding Schools

- ▶ Individual
 - Military experience
 - VA experience
 - Institutionalized prejudice

Managing System Transference

- ▶ Balanced and open acknowledgement of past issues and problems without making excuses, rationalization or blaming
- ▶ Willingness to listen
- ▶ Willingness to help address, facilitate and navigate current system issues
- ▶ Be realistic, don't overpromise, follow through and communicate back to Veteran
- ▶ **Your behavior trumps your words**

Collaboration with Traditional Medicine

Dancing to Restore an Eclipsed Moon



Creative Commons Photo: Permalink: <http://photography.si.edu/SearchImage.aspx?id=5195>
Repository: Smithsonian Institution Libraries.

Healing & Health: Native Perspective

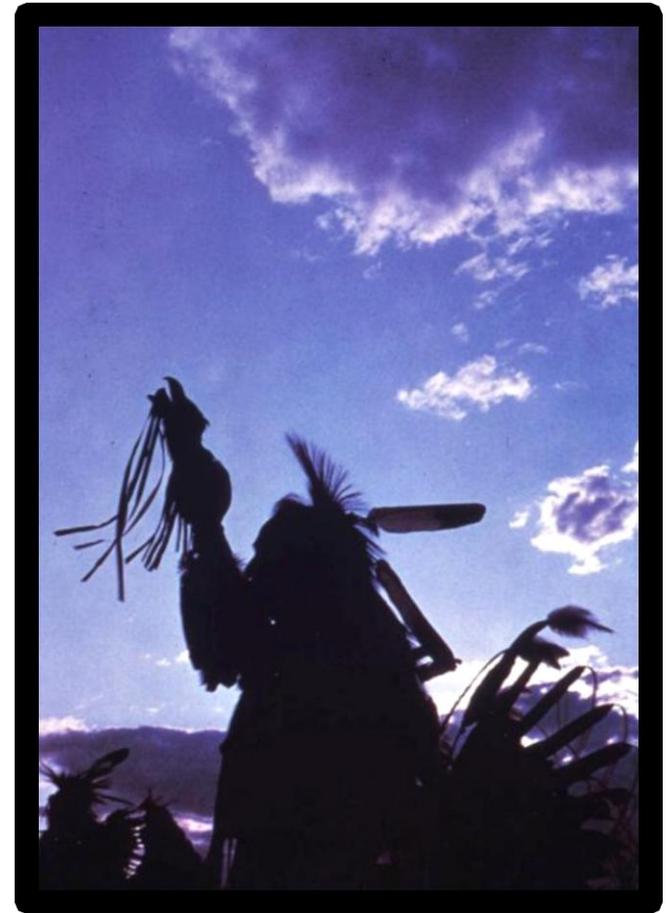
- ▶ Health – what a magic pill can't cure...
 - Many Native People focus on a holistic approach to healing (mind, body and spirit)
 - Often incorporate traditional healing methods with Western medicine (e.g. Ceremonial sweats, talking circles)
 - The “healer” is one who practices, teaches, and leads traditional healing methods

Healing & Health: Native Perspective

It must not be forgotten that our old ones aspired and dreamed, created and struggled, and cared for one another. This generation and future generations must remember that their greatest legacy is the teaching that everyone has healing gifts to build our common decency and wholeness.

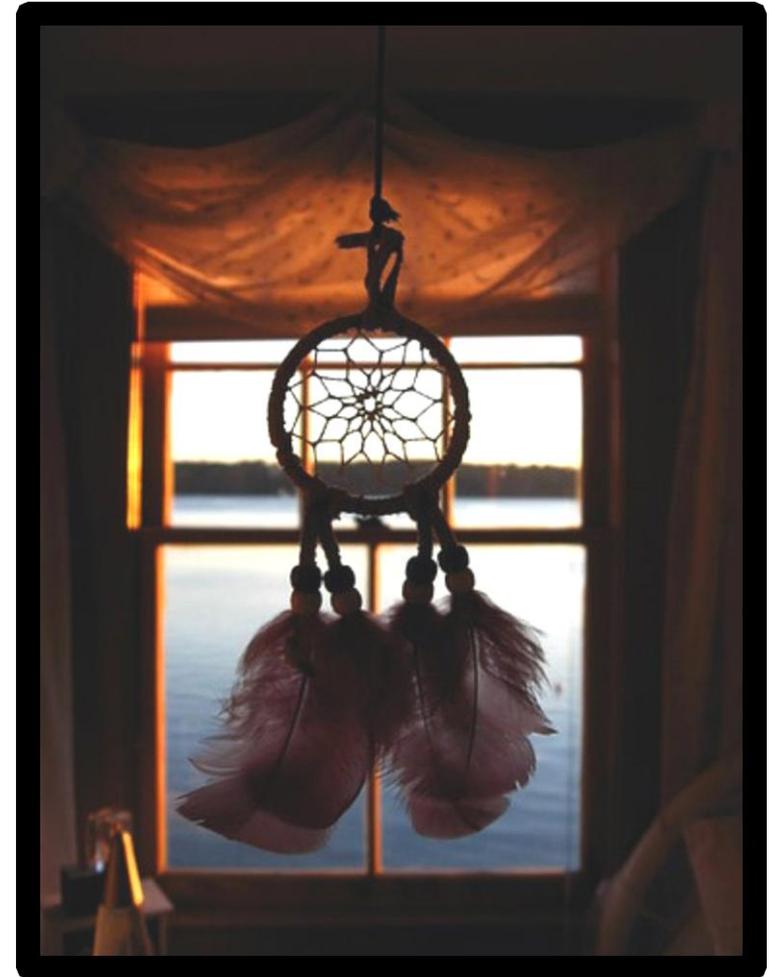
-- Martin Waukazoo, Lakota

* Healing and Mental Health for Native Americans: Speaking in Red (p5)
Ethan Nebelkopf, Mary Phillips



Understanding Native Culture

- ▶ Dreams hold particular relevance for mental health care
 - Tremendous diversity and variability in the meaning, role, and context of dreams among different tribes but dreams often serve important spiritual and emotional functions in many traditional Native societies
 - Nightmares common, especially with Native Veterans

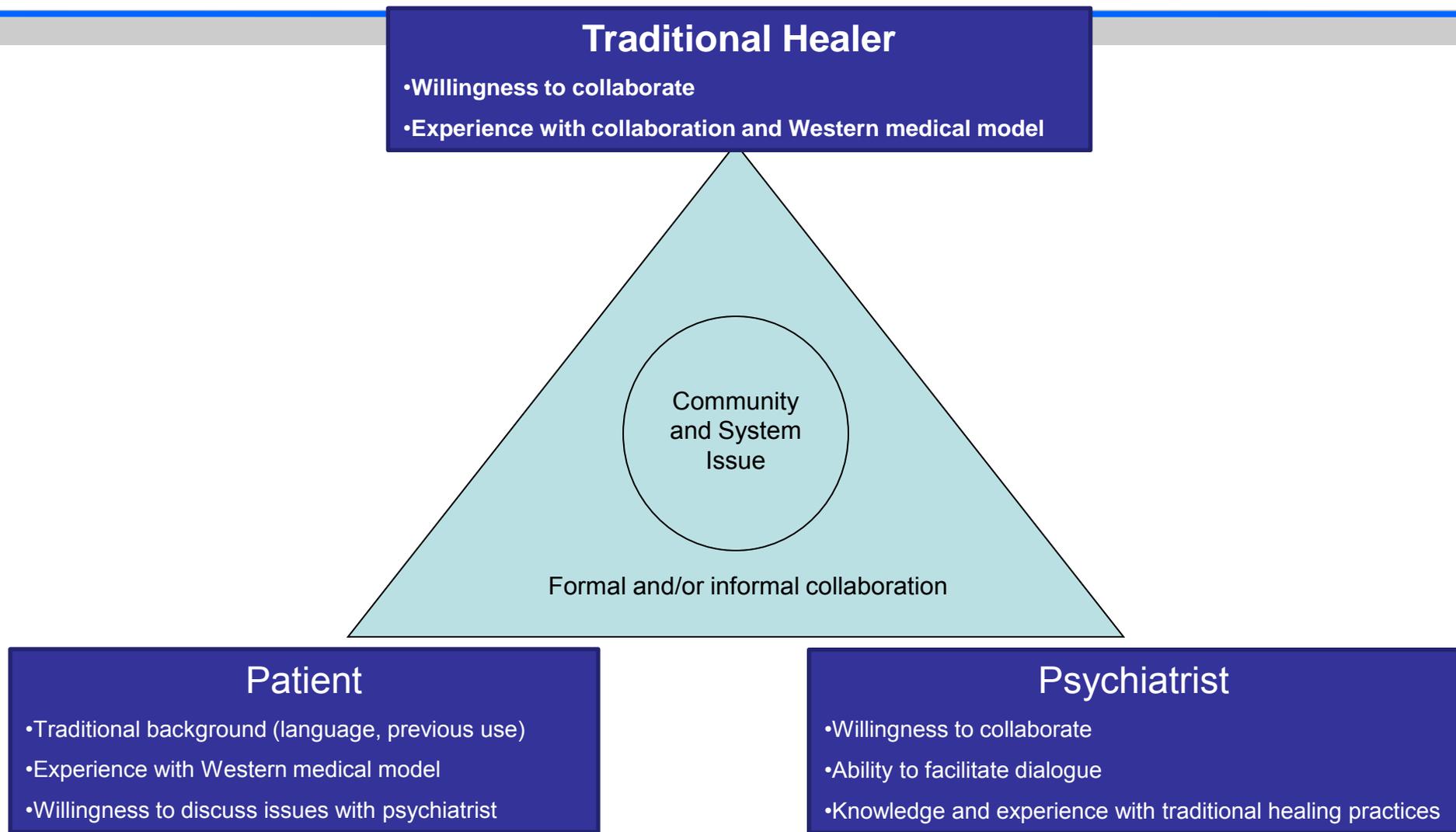


Collaborating with Traditional Healers

- ▶ Guidelines for individual providers interested in collaborating with American Indian traditional healers.
 - Develop background knowledge of the traditional beliefs and practices in the community in which they are working
 - Actively seek an opportunity for collaboration. This may come through clinical care, employment or personal relationships
 - Become a serious student of healing practices of the American Indian culture in which the provider is working
 - Develop a trusting relationship with a community member who has knowledge of traditional healing practices, and is connected with healers in the community
 - Identify collaboration as major goal of ongoing relationships

Adopted from JH, Shore J (Sr.), Manson S. American Indian healers and psychiatrists: building alliances. In *Psychiatrists and Traditional Healers.*, 2009.

Figure 1: Model for Process of Collaboration between AI Healers and Psychiatrists



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