



The decades of sustained migration mean that one third of Croats live abroad, many of these in Australia.

The Croatians have a long settlement history in this country, since 1850.

Large number of migrants arrived prior WW1, due to dissatisfaction with political developments at home. Large numbers also migrated following WW2, fleeing post war political changes.

The third wave, predominantly from Croatia, was between the 1960s and 1970s. This was the largest wave and included those who migrated for political, economic and ideological reasons. Many in this wave were from the lower socio-economic strata, poorly educated and came from the poorest rural regions.

Croats from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, who arrived during the latest wave of migration in early 1990s, had first hand experiences of war. These experiences include people being injured, losing loved ones, witnessing atrocities, political and economic oppression and living with stress and fear. Many of these newly arrived migrants experience ongoing mental health problems, strained personal relationships, family dysfunction and breakdown. Many of these people have failed to acquire adequate English language proficiency and this impairs their ability to access services, information and resources.

CROATIAN

COMMUNICATION WITH THE PATIENT

Language

The Croatian language is the official language of the Republic of Croatia. It belongs to the group of South-Slavic languages. The Croatian language is spoken not only by Croats in Croatia, but also by those in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), Croats in the neighboring countries and those who have emigrated to other continents.

Many people affected by dementia for example do not access relevant services because language specific support is not available. Given the lack of utilisation of services, it is the families who are often forced to bear the burden of care without appropriate information, support and assistance.

In Australia, Croats accept that doctors are likely to use the words death and cancer. Cancer is sometimes seen as

punishment and possibly inherited. Also it may be contagious.

Croats are likely to want detailed explanations of tests and procedures. Health providers may be expected to give high significance to discussions of symptoms.

Communication Style

Greetings on initial meeting will tend to be formal and reserved. A handshake, direct eye contact and the appropriate greeting for the time of the day are standard: “Dobro jutro” (good morning), “Dobar dan” (good day), and “Dobra vecer” (good evening). Address people with their titles, plus surname. If you are unsure of titles, then use “Gospodin” for Mr, “Gospodja” for Mrs and “Gospodjica” for Miss. Only close friends and family members tend to use first names. Never call someone by first name without being invited to. Close friends may greet each other with an embrace and a kiss on each cheek but wait until the Croatian initiates this form of greeting. At social gatherings hosts introduce guests, usually starting with the women and then moving on to the men in a rough approximation of age order, oldest to youngest.

CUSTOMS & VALUES

The family is still the basis of the social structure. The extended family is the norm and relatives remain quite close with both the mother and the father's sides. The family provides its members with a social network and assistance in times of need. However, it is becoming increasingly common for the nuclear family to have its own house. Croatians used to take in elderly parents but now due to both adults in the house working this has become a rare occasion.

Religion

Religion is extremely important to people in Croatia. The majority of Croatians identify themselves with the Catholic religion and they are extremely proud of this identity. The Roman Catholics of Bosnia and Herzegovina identify with the Croatian national culture. It is advisable to ask what religion the patient follows and be mindful that spiritual needs may vary over the course of the treatment.

Holidays and Special Days

Croatians traditionally follow the Roman Catholic Calendar.

Christmas and Easter are important national holidays and are widely celebrated.

January 1	New Year's Day
January 6	Epiphany
	Easter Day
	Easter Monday
May 1	Labour Day
60 days post Easter	Corpus Christi
June 22	Anti-Fascist Struggle Day
June 25	National Day
August 5	Victory Day and Thanksgiving Day
August 15	Assumption of Mary
October 8	Independence Day
November 1	All Saints Day
December 25	Christmas
December 26	St Stephen's Day

TRADITIONALL ATTITUDES TO AGEING/ELDERS IN THE COMMUNITY

In the past in Croatia and BH, nursing homes were often located in isolated areas away from main towns and were generally considered to be the only care option for the destitute with no families.

There was a strong cultural expectation that the role of the family, particularly family members, was to provide the elderly with any necessary support. Until recently the "family" was the only "institutionalized" aged care in Croatia.

While there is generally a cultural expectation for families to care for their ageing relatives, the constraints faced by families, social conditions and the more positive perceptions of residential care have encouraged the aged communities to be more accepting of residential care, provided it is culturally and linguistically appropriate.

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AROUND DEATH & DYING

In the Croatian community in Australia there is still a lack of understanding of palliative care and many people feel more comfortable to be treated at home.

Access to services generally takes place once the situation has reached crisis point. Individuals often continue to struggle on without help. Croats are experiencing embarrassment of having to deal with personal problems in public.

The news of terminally ill patient is first given to the family, who will pass this on to relatives and friends. The family is involved in decision-making about treatment.

If possible, their preferred place of treatment is home.

When a loved one is hospitalized, family and friends visit to show their respect to the terminally ill person. Food is important in the Croatian culture. A terminally ill person may be

encouraged to eat, as it is believed that it is good for the sick person.

A terminally ill person will often receive the Last Rites—Reconciliation and Communion. Family members will call a Catholic priest to sit with the person and administer the Last Rites. Once the patient has died there are a number of rituals which are necessary. The Rosary is important and consists of vocal silent prayer, reflecting on important events in the life of Christ and Our Lady.

Croatians receive condolences at the family home. Viewings are held at the funeral home. At the church, a rosary is recited over the body. Mourners, who traditionally wear dark colours, have an opportunity to throw a flower on the casket as a final goodbye. Elaborate headstones and caskets are often regarded as fitting tributes.

After the burial, mourners are invited for a drinks and food served in memory of the person. Black or dark clothes may be worn for one year or for life.

The deceased's partner and immediate family do not listen to music or attend celebrations, such as weddings or birthdays, for one year.

Some Croats want to be buried in their country of origin and their body may be flown back to Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina..

Majority of Croats hold to a Roman Catholic vision of death and resurrection of the soul. All Saints' Day is a very important observance in Croatia. Families wash and prepare graves, and decorate them with candles, flowers and photographs. People often make several trips to graveyards during the days just before and after All Saints' Day.

ATTITUDES TO PAIN MANAGEMENT

There are mixed attitudes amongst Croats towards taking strong pain relieving medication such as morphine.

Medicine is a normal part of life, but giving morphine is usually a sign being "near the end", which can increase anxiety. Treatment may not be considered complete without medication.

The strong Roman Catholic belief of the Croatian community leads them to reject euthanasia. Relatives play an important role by giving moral and physical support.

APPROPRIATE FOOD

The main meal of the day is a late lunch. In the north and inland of Croatia, the majority of the foods have an Austrian or Hungarian flavor. A typical lunch includes chicken or beef soup, cooked meat, potatoes and bread. Green salads with vinegar and oil are served in the spring and summer, and pickled vegetables in the winter. Along the coast, a meal usually includes fish and pasta, risotto, or polenta. Lamb is common in the Dalmatian highland region. Breakfast is simple, usually consisting of strong coffee and bread with jam. The traditional dinner typically consists of leftovers from lunch, cold meats, and cheese with bread.

For holidays or special occasions there are larger quantities of food, particularly meat. Special cakes are also prepared. Large quantities of alcohol are part of any celebration. Whenever people get together, they usually drink together. Strong Turkish-style coffee and espresso are important symbols of hospitality. Men usually are offered an alcoholic drink.

SUITABLE MUSIC

Traditional music from their home country may be appropriate to play. Folklore plays a key role in preserving the culture. Life experiences are translated into verse, poetic songs, melodies, fairy tales, symbolic rituals, music, dance, costumes. Folk songs and poems often attest to the sentiment and regard between family members. Croats have maintained a strong distinctive culture. They depict their life through folklore. Songs, dance and costumes exist for every occasion in all parts of the country. Guitars, accordions, violins, tambura or mandolin are common folk instruments.

RELATED INFORMATION AVAILABLE IN CROATIAN

Visit the following websites to download information related to palliative care and translated material for Croatian speaking individuals and carers:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-publicat-croatian-index.htm>

<http://www.palliativecare.org.au/Default.aspx?tabid=2116>

<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/languages/hr.htm>

<http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au/Resources/Multilingual/Croatian>

http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=102.920

<http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/languages/Croatian.html>

KEY CONTACTS

Australian Croatian Community Services

Australian Croatian Community Services (ACCS) is the peak community services agency for people from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in Victoria. It is a community based non profit organization that has been providing services to the target communities for over 20 years. ACCS's mission is to provide an extensive range of culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and services to people of Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian backgrounds.

**128-130 Walker Street
DANDENONG VIC 3175
T 03 9791 6000
F 03 9791 6011**

**40 Pickett Street
FOOTSCRAY VIC 3011
T 03 9689 5811
F 03 9689 8419**

COMMUNITY CONTACTS

Croatian Catholic Centres

**St Leopold Bogdan Mandic
ARDEER VIC 3022
T 03 9363 7434**

**'Duha Svetoga' Church
KEYSBOROUGH VIC 3173
T 03 9701 6131**

**St Nicholas' Church
CLIFTON HILL VIC 3068
T 03 9482 3479**

**Croatian Catholic Church
GEELONG VIC 3215
T 03 5278 7957**

References:

- www.accs.asn.au
- www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Croatia.html#ixzz108TsnviQ
- www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/health_workers/croatian.pdf

*Prepared by
Silvana Pavlovski
CPP Project Worker
silvana.pavlovski@accs.asn.au
www.accs.asn.au*