



# Walking in Two Worlds: End of Life (EOL) Beliefs & Rituals in the Hmong Community

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## MAJOR FINDINGS

- Differences and similarities with regard to end of life (EOL) beliefs and rituals between Hmong elders who practice Shamanism and those who practice Christianity
- Hmong find practicing Shamanistic beliefs and rituals in the U.S. may not be feasible and so they have to adapt  
*“We are unable to, to full-fill what we, what our uh, tradition or practices, you know, so we can’t do everything. So now, I think that I would like to see something we can do, the things we cannot do, we cannot do, and we be, we be more flexible.” (Hmong elder)*

### Background

- Hmong recruited by U.S. CIA to fight Communist regime in Laos during Vietnam War
- 1975 first Hmong refugees arrived in U.S. per prior agreement with CIA
- Now 260,000 Hmong in U.S.
- Bring traditional (EOL) beliefs and rituals, and face challenges in practicing these
- U.S. EOL providers lack knowledge of these beliefs and rituals
- Also Hmong differ: some adhere to traditional practices, some mainstream and some Christian
- Currently, little research done on this topic and without more knowledge difficult to provide culturally appropriate services

### Data and Sample

- 20 Hmong participants: elders and not terminal
- Face-to-face qualitative interviews
- Conducted in English or Hmong language
- Mean age 66
- 65% Shamanists & 35% Christians
- Conventional Content Thematic Analysis used

### Results

#### *Shamanists & Christians Shared Beliefs & Rituals*

- Family and children provide EOL care
- Die at home
- Leave money to children
- Prepare clothing to wear in spirit world (Shamanist) or heaven (Christian)

### Results, cont.

#### *Shamanists Beliefs & Rituals*

- Soul calling & spiritual offerings
- Herbal medicine
- At least 7-8 family members required to provide EOL care
- Same sex care provider for intimate care: modesty valued
- Female caregivers cook, clean, provide direct care
- Men discuss the rituals that need to be performed
- Flexibility is needed for Hmong in U.S.: not possible to carry out all traditional EOL practices

#### *Christian Beliefs & Rituals*

- Open to using long-term care facilities or services
- Pray to God at end of life
- Belief will be with God after death
- Planning for funeral before death
- Open to training on providing care to terminally ill elders

### Implications

- Assess Hmong clients beliefs and rituals and not assume all to be traditional in their practices
- Future research needed on ability of hospice providers to honor the more traditional beliefs and rituals

### Limitations

- Small sample size
- Sample not generalizable
- Self-selection likely: traditional Hmong elders tend to believe speaking of EOL is taboo
- Study conducted in one geographic area

