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Caring for a Muslim Patient

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Caring for a Muslim Patient



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Caring for a Muslim Patient



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Foreword

The Irish Hospice Foundation is very grateful to Ali Selim, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Imams for his generous co-operation with the editing of this booklet. It is an adapted version of “Care of the Muslim Patient” which had been thoroughly and thoughtfully prepared by Dr Zahir Shah Afridi and colleagues arising from discussions with the Care for People Dying in Hospital Project. The project was initiated by The Irish Hospice Foundation in partnership with Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda, Co Louth.

This booklet intends to facilitate health and hospital workers unfamiliar with Islam in their treatment of the Muslim patient. It looks at the religious life of observant Muslims, their views on the family, marriage, maternity and birth, as well as dress, diet, fasting, health practices and end-of-life care.

Immigration is a relatively new experience for Ireland, so some Irish people may not know that Islam is a world-wide religion of perhaps one billion adherents, largely represented by two groups, Sunni and Shi’a. However, it is important to differentiate between ethnic customs and the Islamic tradition. Also, as with any of the great religions, members will adhere to their religious obligations with varying degrees of emphasis.

A Brief Look at Islam

Islam places the onus of practicing religion on the individual. It has no clergy as such, although Muslims are supported in their faith by learned scholars (Ulama) who have been formally educated in Islamic studies and the Arabic language.

Islam means submission and obedience to the will of God. It aims to achieve peace with self and surroundings. Islam consists of six articles of faith and five “fundamental pillars” that distinguish someone as a Muslim.

Beliefs

A Muslim believes in Allah (God Almighty), the Angels and Prophets of God (from Adam to Jesus and then Muhammad, as the last prophet of God), Books of God (for example, Psalms of David, the Torah, the Bible and the Noble Qur’an), the last day, destiny, and resurrection.

The Five Fundamental Pillars of Islam

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Description</i>
Ash'shahadatan	The two testimonies	There is no God save Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah
A s'salah	The Prayers	Specific sayings and acts of worship said five times a day
Az'zakah	Almsgiving	2.5% of personal wealth annually paid to those who need it
As'sawm	Fasting	Abstinence from eating, drinking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset during the 9th lunar month (Ramadan)
Al Hajj	Pilgrimage	Pilgrimage to Makkah once in a life for those physically and financially able

A Glance at Muslim Life

The Family

In Islam both sexes are equal. Their roles, of course, are different, as are their biological and psychological needs. The rights of women are equal to those of men, although not necessarily identical. The Qur'an strongly reproaches those who believe women to be inferior to men. In Islamic terms men are appointed protectors over women as they are responsible for providing food, shelter, and clothing for their wives and children.

Marriage is considered a solemn and sacred contract with God. Husbands and wives have definite responsibilities which are complementary to each other. They must show mutual respect at all times. Muslim men are permitted to have up to four wives. This is not a recommendation but a permission given by God under certain circumstances (for example, to compensate for the loss of men in wars; to minimise prostitution and adultery; where a previous wife is so disabled that she cannot care for her family, or where a wife is unable to bear any children). All wives must be treated equally.

Benevolence towards parents is expected and the parent-child relationship should be based on mutual love and respect. In Islam, a child has an inalienable right to life and equal chances in life. No discrimination is permitted.

Rules of family living are clearly stated in the Qur'an. Whether they live together with their children or separately, parents are usually consulted in all decision-making processes.

Care of the Elderly

The elderly in the community should be regarded with deep respect. They should be given priority in all walks of life. The Qur'an strongly advocates the care of the elderly. Therefore, the care of the elderly is regarded as an avenue to Heaven, another expression of worship.

Human Relations

Muslims believe every human being is a member of the universal family. Because of this common bond, there is no room for racial prejudice, social injustice or second-class citizenship. Pre-marital sex and adultery are strictly prohibited. From puberty on, males and females are not allowed to mix freely. All manner of talking, walking, looking, and dressing in public that may instigate temptation, arouse desire, stir suspicion or indicate immodesty and indecency are prohibited.

Sexual intercourse is forbidden during menstruation.

Homosexual and lesbian practices are forbidden.

Contraception

Islam recognises that only God has the power to give children to couples. The Pill and barrier methods of contraception are not forbidden. Use of these methods must be indicated on medical grounds. The husband and wife practice contraception on the basis of mutual consultation. The rhythm method and coitus interruptus are acceptable. The husband is not allowed to practice coitus interruptus without his wife's permission. Irreversible contraception: tubal ligations and vasectomies, for example, are only permissible if the mother's life is threatened. This should be determined by a group of doctors.

Embryo Experimentation

Embryo experimentation is forbidden. This is regarded as tantamount to tampering with God's creation.

In-vitro Fertilisation

In-vitro fertilisation and artificial insemination are permitted provided that the husband's sperm is used. Donor sperm is strictly prohibited.

Abortion

Abortion is not permitted in Islam unless the continuation of the pregnancy threatens the mother's life. The already established life takes precedence over the emerging life. A group of doctors should determine whether the mother's life is threatened.

Divorce

Islam makes provision for divorce by both husband and wife after all attempts at reconciliation have failed.

Women in Islam

According to the Qur'an men and women are equal and should be treated as such. The Muslim woman has the right to choose her husband. Both are considered equal partners in life. As a wife, she has a right to kind and just treatment by her husband, which she should reciprocate. She has a full right to participate in any decision, domestic or political. She carries her own surname and does not lose any rights after marriage. She has full rights over the money that she earns.

Islam considers the raising of children in a careful manner with discipline to be vital. Hence, the role of the housewife and mother is encouraged and greatly respected.

Maternity Services

A female Muslim should be cared for by females (and a male Muslim by males). This is most important during confinement/delivery when strict privacy is essential. Only female health workers should be present with a female patient. Exposure should be kept to a minimum. The position of delivery should be discussed and the woman given the choice. There is no reason, except for personal modesty or embarrassment, that a husband should not be present during childbirth.

The Newborn Child

A newborn child should have the Call to Prayer recited in each ear soon after birth. It is usually done by the father. The practice of male circumcision is usually observed at the early stages of a child's life.

Foster Care

Foster care, especially of orphans, is encouraged provided:

- the child is allowed to retain the name of the biological parents. If the name is unknown, he/she must be called a brother/sister in faith;
- the wealth of the child, if any, especially in the case of orphans is kept separately and given to the child when he/she reaches adulthood;
- on attaining puberty, the adopted person assumes the status of a stranger in the house with all its Islamic ramifications;
- marriage may take place between a foster person and a member of the family of the foster family, provided that the foster mother did not breast-feed both persons concerned.

Adoption

Adoption is unacceptable in Islam.

Dress

In general, unless necessary, a Muslim is not allowed to expose his or her body in the presence of a potential spouse. One may find varying adherence to this dress code depending on the individual and perhaps his or her country of origin. However, in general terms, modesty dictates that a male is not allowed to expose the area between his umbilicus and his knees. A female is required to be covered apart from the hands and face, although a minority of women will cover their faces.

The dress rule is applicable in the presence of members of the opposite sex however there is a certain amount of flexibility in the presence of members of the same sex.

The Qur'an clearly defines this, and for women also details the family members in front of whom she may appear without her full cover. Muslims generally wear clothing that does not indicate the outline of their bodies. Hospital attire should be provided that meets these requirements, and if not, the patients can be advised to bring some of their own appropriate clothing.

A beard is considered important to the Muslim male patient. Like any other patient, permission must be obtained to shave any part of the beard, which should be done by a man.

Diet

All kitchen staff should be aware that only Halal meat (i.e. meat slaughtered according to religious requirements) must be given to Muslim patients. They should also be made aware that Muslims do not eat pork or any other pig meat and its products, for example, bacon, ham or sausages. A knife used for slicing pork must not be used to cut anything to be given to a Muslim, unless carefully washed.

Halal meat is readily available in Ireland. However, if Halal products are not available, Muslims should be given the choice of having seafood, eggs, fruit and vegetables. (See the Appendix for a list of approved and forbidden foods).

When serving food or drinks allow for receipt in the right hand. Muslims use the left hand to cleanse themselves after going to the toilet. Therefore when eating, giving or receiving, it is preferable to use the right hand.

Fasting

Pregnant, lactating or menstruating women, the sick and travellers, are exempt from fasting but Islam puts the onus on the sick person to decide whether to fast, having consulted a physician.

(See also: Ramadan)

Religious Observance

A Muslim prays five times a day. If possible, a room should be made available for prayer. The hospital chapel may be used provided no icons are present.

A space is required to lay out a prayer mat. An indication of the direction of Makkah, roughly south-east in Ireland, should be evident. In ill-health prayers may be performed while seated or even lying down. Muslims are required to wash prior to prayer. On Fridays, a Muslim patient may receive a number of hospital visitors above the normal. (See also: Visiting the Sick).

Ramadan

Ramadan is a special month of prayer and religious obligation, specifically fasting - the third pillar of Islam. Fasting in the month of Ramadan is compulsory for all healthy, adult Muslims on reaching puberty. It is the most widely practiced of all Muslim forms of worship. Every individual is responsible for his or her own fast.

The start of Ramadan is based on the sighting of the new moon and astronomical calculations. Muslims adhere to the Islamic lunar calendar which is shorter than the Western Gregorian Calendar by 11 days. This means that the date of Ramadan moves according to the lunar cycle.

Fasting begins at dawn and ends at sunset. It is a total fast with abstinence from any food or drink. Abstinence from sexual

relations during daylight hours is also required. The usual practice is to have a pre-fast meal (suhoor) and a post-fast meal (iftar) after sunset. Smoking is not allowed. Gargling is acceptable as long as fluid is not swallowed. The end of Ramadan is celebrated by a festival of commemoration–Eid-ul-Fitir. It is appropriate to offer people good wishes at Eid, for example “Eid Mubarak”–A blessed Eid.

How Muslims View Illness

During illness Muslims are expected to seek God's help with patience and prayers. They should increase their personal reflection on God to obtain peace and seek forgiveness, and give more in charity. They should spend more time reading and listening to the Qu’ran. Although they may consider illness as atonement for their sins, Muslims do not consider illness a "punishment" from God. They believe that dying is part of living and an entrance to the next life.

Visiting the Sick

Strong emphasis is placed on the virtues of visiting the sick. This is why many visitors may wish to visit the person in hospital.

Islamic Health Practices

Medicines Containing Alcohol

Where a choice exists, medicines containing alcohol should not be used. In emergency situations, this rule does not apply if an alternate drug is unavailable, but this should be explained to the patient.

Modesty

Effort should be made to modify medical examination techniques so that the patient is exposed as little as possible. In Ireland, great emphasis is placed on modesty: a screen separates the woman at the waist from the examiner performing a vaginal or rectal examination, and even the legs are draped.

Fasting and Medication

Strict adherence to fasting may lead to problems with medication and compliance. Fasting is one of the pillars of Islam. Muslim patients observe fasting unless doctors advise otherwise.

Touching and Care Provision

Unnecessary touching between non-related people of opposite sexes should be avoided. If possible, patients should be cared for by a person of the same sex.

Hygiene

Cleanliness is considered "half of the faith". Washing facilities (a simple plastic container) should be made available in the ward and in the toilets for the individual to wash his or her private parts.

For in-patients who are bedridden, special care should be taken with cleanliness, especially with discharges, urine, stools, and bleeding from any orifice, bearing in mind that the patient may wish to pray in bed. A beaker or flask of water should be made available to bedridden Muslim patients whenever they use a bed pan. Bed baths must be given by members of the same sex. Hand washing before and after meals is particularly important to Muslims. Washing facilities should be made available to bedridden patients at meal times.

End-of-Life Care

For a terminally-ill patient

If a patient is in coma, it is preferred that the face of the patient be turned to face Makkah, i.e. roughly south-east in Ireland. It is important for Muslims to recite the Qur'an or prayers in front of the patient or in a room close by. The relatives should be invited to pray if they wish.

The hospital chapel may be used for prayers, provided no icons are present. Access to a religious leader should be made available, if not already arranged by the relatives. A family member may wish to remain with the patient at all times, if appropriate medically.

For a patient who has just died

The face of the deceased should preferably be turned towards Makkah. The face, and indeed, the whole body of the deceased must be covered by a sheet. The body must be handled as gently as possible. Muslims believe that the soul remains close to the body until burial. The body must be handled with utmost respect only by a person of the same sex. Relatives may wish to pray close to the body or in a room close by.

Islam permits a post-mortem examination for sound reason, but the statutory laws of the country must be followed. The body should not be washed unless necessary. Islamic washing of the body is done before burial (Ghusl). If no relatives are available, the Islamic Council should be contacted. Muslim burials are

performed as soon as possible after death, sometimes on the same day.

Intrauterine Death

A miscarriage or an intrauterine death occurring more than 120 days after conception would require burial, as a foetus after that time is regarded as a viable baby. Such foetuses should therefore be given to the parents for proper burial. The foetus is given a name before burial.

Grieving and Bereavement

Death is seen as something predestined by God. It is only the beginning of eternal life. The more pious families may thus appear inappropriately calm and accepting by Western standards.

In Islam, a widow may marry after four months and ten days, during which time she must have at least one menstruation. This is to ensure that she is not pregnant. A pregnant widow may remarry if 42 days has elapsed since the birth of her child. This child must bear the name of the deceased. The outward show of grief in the form of chest banging or wailing is forbidden.

Inheritance

The disposal of a deceased's estate is detailed in the Qur'an.

Specific Clinical Situations

Mental Illness or Intellectual Disabilities

A person diagnosed as having a mental illness, or a profound intellectual disability, is absolved from all the obligatory requirements in Islam. For instance, obligatory prayer, fasting or pilgrimage are not required. In the first instance the family, if any, is responsible for the patient. If this is not possible, his or her care becomes the responsibility of the State.

Blood Transfusions and Organ Transplant

Blood transfusions and transplants of various human organs are acceptable in Islam. Decisions about organ transplants are made on an individual basis and certain conditions have to be fulfilled.

Euthanasia and Suicide

Euthanasia and suicide are forbidden in Islam. Euthanasia is regarded as murder by the person who is performing it and suicide by the person ending his/her life.

Conclusions

Health care professionals should adopt a system of "sensible awareness" with regard to Islamic belief and practice. This requires a holistic assessment of a patient's cultural and religious beliefs to ensure the safe implementation of sensitive and appropriate health care for a positive health outcome. Strengthening links with the local community and personnel familiar with the Islamic culture will enhance the best possible practice.

An essential aspect of health care is the health care providers' role in understanding the concerns of the patient and family and communicating these concerns to all those involved in the decision-making process. The principles of sanctity of life, alleviation of suffering, respect for the patient's autonomy while achieving the best medical treatment without harm, and always being honest and truthful in giving information, apply equally to all. Such equality remains a principle tenet of Islam.

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** This paper has not considered the pros and cons of using interpreters although their role as a cultural bridge is an invaluable resource. This is particularly the case where literacy problems may preclude written information and it is essential to ensure patient choice and rights are preserved. The choice of professional interpreters, rather than family or local community members will be an issue for consideration by the health care provider.*

Appendix

General dietary choices for Muslim patients

APPROVED (HALAL)	MEAT AND SUBSTITUTES Chicken, beef, lamb killed by Muslim slaughter men All seafood Eggs cooked in water, butter, vegetable margarine or vegetable oil Dried beans and lentils, baked beans
FORBIDDEN (HARAM)	Pork and all pig products (bacon, ham, salami)
APPROVED	MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS Milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream made without animal fat
FORBIDDEN	Ice cream made with animal fat
APPROVED	FRUIT AND VEGETABLES All fruit or vegetables raw, dried, canned or cooked using water, vegetable fats or butter
FORBIDDEN	Any fried or roasted in lard or dripping

APPROVED

BREAD AND CEREALS

All breakfast cereals. Bread, cakes and biscuits prepared without animal fat other than butter (Read labels). Rice cooked without animal fat, pasta

APPROVED

FATS AND OILS

Butter, vegetable margarine, olive oil, peanut oil, vegetable oils

FORBIDDEN

Lard, dripping, suet, other animal fats (except butter) and any foods made with or cooked in them

APPROVED

BEVERAGES

Tea, coffee, water, fruit juices, soft drinks, mineral and soda water, cordials

FORBIDDEN

Alcohol and foods cooked with alcohol e.g. trifles, puddings, sauces

APPROVED

SOUPS

Any made without pork, ham or animal fats

FORBIDDEN

Any with ham bone stock

APPROVED

DESSERTS

Any without alcohol, lard, dripping or suet, for example fruit-based, custards, tofu ice cream or sherbet, puddings made with butter or vegetable margarine, egg dishes, rice dishes

FORBIDDEN

Any with alcohol, lard, suet dripping, ice cream with animal fat

APPROVED

MISCELLANEOUS

Coconut milk, spices, including chilli, curry powder, pickles, chutneys

FORBIDDEN

Pork product, Vanilla essence (alcohol base)

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