



Caring for the Muslim Patient

A Muslim is a follower of ISLAM which means "submission" to the will of God. Most religious historians view Islam as having been founded in 622 CE by Mohammad the Prophet (peace be upon him). He lived from about 570 to 632 CE. The religion started in Mecca, when the angel Jibril (a.k.a. Jibreel; Gabriel in English) read the first revelation to Mohammad (pbuh).

Muslims believe in one God, Allah, and in Mohammed, Allah's prophet, or messenger. Mohammed is believed to be the last in a long line of prophets, which include Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. Muslims believe in life after death, and that Allah will judge a person according to what he has done. Most Muslims in Britain come from Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Kashmir, and there are also quite large Turkish and Turkish Cypriot Muslim communities. There are different groups of Muslims - Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims, as well as Ahmaddiya and beliefs and practices differ. The local Iman will be able to offer help and advice.

SIGNIFICANT TERMS

KORAN - Islamic Holy Book which is the teaching of Mohammed. The Hospital Chaplains can provide a copy of the Koran if it is needed. It should be treated with great respect and no items placed upon it.

MOSQUE - Muslim centre for worship and religious instruction. It is in the charge of a prayer leader - the **IMAN** - who is elected and supported by the congregation.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

MODESTY - Muslims follow a strict code of modesty. For this reason, placing a Muslim patient in a mixed sex bay must be avoided. Treatment by a medical practitioner of the same sex is strongly preferred. A woman may wish her husband to be present when she is examined.

DIET - Only Halal (ritually slaughtered) meat can be eaten. Both pork and alcohol are forbidden. The taking of medication during a fast may cause difficulty to patients. The local mosque may offer help.

PRAYER

Muslims pray 5 times a day, facing Mecca (South-East). The times of prayer are dawn, noon, mid afternoon, just after sunset, and before retiring to bed. Before every act of prayer the Muslim will need to wash - water poured from a jug would be appreciated. If a Muslim patient is in bed and physically unable to face Mecca it would still be helpful to indicate the direction to them. Privacy should be offered for prayer by drawing the curtains around the bed or ideally a quiet room should be provided.

AS DEATH APPROACHES

The dying patient may want to sit, or lie, facing Mecca, and this may entail moving the bed. The family will probably want to pray at the bedside of their loved one, and perhaps to read to them from the Koran. The Iman is not required to attend the death of a Muslim, but he is often invited to do so.

LAST OFFICES

After death the patient's body should be wrapped in a plain white sheet. The body should not be washed, nor the nails cut. The foot of the bed should face Mecca, or the patient should be turned on their right side in order that they look towards the Holy City. Non-Muslims touching the body must wear gloves. The washing and preparation of the body should normally be left to the family, or to the Islamic Funeral Directors. In normal circumstances, when Muslims are carrying out the last offices themselves, they will tie the patient's feet together with a thread around the toes, and bandage the face in order to keep the mouth closed.

A Muslim is always buried, and immediate (next-day) burial is preferred if at all possible. Muslims may oppose post-mortems, but there is no objection if this is required by law. Organ donation would usually be allowed with the permission of all concerned.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

The observance of **RAMADAN** is one of the 5 pillars of the Muslim faith (see fact sheet below).

Ramadan is held during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Because the lunar calendar has 354 days each year instead of 365, the observance of Ramadan, like the other festivals, slips back 11 days each year.

During Ramadan the Muslim will eat 90 minutes before sunrise, and then again after sunset. Fasting during Ramadan is expected of all healthy Muslims over the age of 12 years. Many who are terminally ill feel especially strongly about Ramadan as a spiritual discipline. The normal rule is that the elderly and the sick do not fast for the whole month, but should fast a little if they can.

It is important to note that, fasting for some Muslims can also mean that nothing can be taken into the body not only through the mouth, but also through the nose, injection (*), or suppository, from dawn to sunset. This has implications, especially for pain control, and makes it essential that this is discussed with the patient, without subjecting them to undue pressure.

EVERY MUSLIM PATIENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND PRACTICE MAY VARY