

Religious Practices

Resource Folder

Ward 118

This folder has been developed as a **brief** guide to the practices of various religions, particularly in relation to end of life care. If you are caring for a patient with specific religious or spiritual needs that are not covered in this resource, please contact Chaplaincy. They are an invaluable source of information and have many useful resources and contacts.

Chaplaincy: 21990

Baha'i

Religious practices: Usually recite a daily prayer. People who are ill are usually exempt from these but may still wish to recite them and would appreciate privacy.

Diet: No specific requirements.

Fasting: The Baha'i fast takes place every year from 2-20 March, between sunrise and sunset. Fasting is not obligatory during sickness, pregnancy, breastfeeding or those over 70.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: No specific requirements.

Death and Dying: Baha'i treat the body of a deceased person with great respect. Baha'i law prescribes that burial should take place at a distance of no more than an hour's journey from the place of death. The body should not be cremated or embalmed. Baha'i relatives and friends will want to say prayers for the dead. Autopsies and post mortem examinations are acceptable if necessary.

Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation: Most Baha'i would have no objections.

Brahma Kumaris

Religious practices: Meditation is practiced regularly, especially in the early hours of the morning; would appreciate a quiet area for this.

Diet: Encouraged to eat a lacto-vegetarian diet (dairy products permitted). Most Brahma Kumaris do not use onions or garlic in cooking and prefer to have their food cooked and blessed by fellow Brahma Kumaris.

Fasting: None.

Personal Hygiene: Take a shower every morning and wash/shower after a bowel movement.

Modesty and dress: May prefer medical examination to be undertaken by someone of the same sex.

Death and Dying: Prefer cremation over burial.

Blood transfusion, transplants and organ donation: No objections.

Buddhism

Religious practices: Most practice meditation and may practice chanting of prayers/sacred texts.

Diet: Many are vegetarian or vegan. Some may only eat one main meal a day (usually before midday).

Fasting: If their health allows, some Buddhists fast on new moon and full moon days and on specific festival days.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: No specific requirements.

Death and dying: Requirements will depend on the Buddhist group. You should find out from the patient or family which specific form or school of Buddhism the patient practises before contacting chaplaincy for further information about requirements.

The most important consideration relates to the patient's state of mind at the time of death, for this will influence how they experience the rebirth. Nearing the time of death, the state of mind should ideally be one of peace. The patient/family may wish for a Buddha figure close by and may ask for counselling from a fellow Buddhist, with prayers or sacred texts.

After death, in many schools of Buddhism there is no ritual requirement and normal hospital procedures are accepted. However, some Buddhists hold strong views about how the body should be treated after death. You should ask about such views before death occurs.

After death, the main Buddhist tradition is for the family to request prayers from the sangha

(usually a monk, lama, nun, priest or order member) of the appropriate school of Buddhism and to perform certain actions and dedicate them to the dead person. Some patients and relatives may object to a post mortem due to the belief that the mind may stay in the body for some time after the heart has stopped. Most Buddhists are cremated.

Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation: No religious objections but attitudes amongst Buddhists to organ transplants/donation vary as they believe the mind stays in the body for some time after death.

Christianity

Religious practices: Key practices are Holy Communion, confession, absolution and the Anointing of the Sick. Prayer is very important.

Diet: No specific requirements:

Fasting: None.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: No specific requirements.

Death and Dying: Dying patients of all denominations may want the services of the appropriate chaplain. It is important that Roman Catholic patients be offered the Sacrament of the Sick.

Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation: No objections (except Jehovah's Witnesses).

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)

Religious Practices: The church administers spiritual healing to the sick. At the request of the patient, 2 members of the LDS priesthood may visit them. Can be contacted through the chaplaincy service.

Diet: Against the use of stimulants and substances harmful to the body. Will refuse tea and coffee.

Fasting: If medically fit, all Mormons fast for 24 hours on the first Sunday of each month.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: Some Mormons will wear special 'endowment' undergarments (white knee length shorts). These are intensely private and sacred. May be removed in an emergency but must be treated with respect at all times. Not usually worn in hospital.

Death and Dying: No special rituals. Cremation is not generally encouraged.

Blood transfusion, transplants and organ donation: No objection.

Hinduism

Religious practices: Like to pray twice daily.

Diet: Most are vegetarian. The cow is a sacred animal so strictly no beef. Some may refuse egg, onion and garlic. Dairy produce is acceptable as long as it is free from rennet.

Fasting: Fasting is commonly practiced on new moon days and during festivals, but few Hindus insist on fasting in hospital.

Personal Hygiene: Will wash after using the toilet. Hindus prefer to wash in free flowing water, rather than sit in a bath.

Modesty and dress: Women prefer female staff to attend to them. Women may not accept a gown as it is short. Some women wear bangles or a thread and should not be removed without permission. Some Hindus wear a red spot on their forehead; this should not be removed without permission.

Death and Dying: Relatives will want to maintain a bedside vigil while the patient is dying. Some may wish to read from a holy book. After death, the body should always be covered. Sacred objects should not be removed. Relatives will want to wash the body and put on new clothes before removing the body from the hospital. Traditionally the eldest son of the deceased should take a leading role in this, regardless of how young he may be.

Blood transfusion, transplants and organ donation: No objections.

Humanist

Religious Practice: Not relevant.

Diet: No specific requirements.

Fasting: None.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: No specific requirements.

Death and Dying: Many humanists will have a living will/advanced directive.
Humanists favour cremation or green burials.

Blood transfusion, transplants and organ donation: No objections.

Islam (Muslim)

Religious practices: Pray 5 times a day and must face towards Makkah (south east).

Diet: Will only accept halal food. All products from pork, carrion or blood are forbidden.

Fasting: Fast during the month of Ramadan (date varies each year). Muslims will not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan. The sick or very old are exempt.

Personal Hygiene: Cleanliness is of great importance. Must have water to wash with before prayer and after toileting. Prefer free flowing water and will likely not use a bath.

Modesty and dress: Generally a woman will not be allowed to be examined by male staff. A woman may not want to wear a gown as it is short. Many women wear a headscarf (hijab) or a burka.

Death and Dying: It is important to ask the family if they have any particular wishes regarding care before and after death. A dying patient should lie on their right side facing Makkah (south east). Friends and family may want to read from the Qur'an . It is an important religious duty to visit the sick and dying, so there may be a large number of visitors. If washing is done by nursing staff, it must be by staff of the same sex as the patient. The NOK will usually arrange to wash the body before burial (this may be done at the Mosque by religious elders). The body must be buried as soon as possible (usually within 24hours). A post mortem should be avoided if possible as this may cause considerable distress.

Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation: No issues relating to blood transfusions, but organ donation will often be met with reluctance.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Religious practices: No specific requirements.

Diet: Will reject food containing blood but have no other requirements.

Fasting: None.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: No specific requirements.

Death and Dying: No specific rituals. Spiritual care is usually provided by other Witnesses.

Blood Transfusion, transplants and organ donation: Strictly no blood transfusion but may accept minor blood components such as albumin, immune globulins etc. Each Witness must decide individually if they will accept these. Jehovah's witnesses may accept transplant under certain circumstances. They may also object to certain organs being donated.

Judaism

Religious practices: Will observe the Jewish Sabbath (dusk on Friday to full darkness on Saturday) every week. Jews often pray 3 times daily.

Diet: Kosher diet only. There are some very specific rules about food, food preparation and how food is served, so it may be best to check with the patient/relative.

Fasting: There is a 25 hour fast on Yom Kippur (the most important holy day of the year), but an unwell person would be exempt. There are 5 further days of fasting but there is greater leniency with these.

Personal Hygiene: Will want to wash before eating. Some Jews may not wash during major festivals. Some men prefer to be bearded.

Modesty and dress: Will usually want to be examined/treated by a person of the same sex. Will want to keep the body covered as much as possible. May wish to keep head covered at all times.

Death and Dying: There are specific Jewish laws and customs for dealing with the dead. It is important to contact the family and the appropriate Burial Society as soon as possible (contact through chaplaincy service). The range of what you can and cannot do for a dying person will vary so you should consult a rabbi acceptable to the family. When a Jewish person dies, the following guidelines should be followed:

1. Do not touch the body until 20 mins after death.
2. Do not wash the body (crevices may be cleaned if required)
3. Do not remove false teeth or other prostheses.
4. Close the eyes.
5. Straighten the body out, laying flat with feet together and arms by the side.
6. Cover the body with a plain white sheet.

Some families may want to ensure that a fellow Jew sits with the body after death. Psalms may be recited during this time.

Blood transfusion, transplants and organ donation: No objections but families may want to consult a rabbi before agreeing to organ donation.

Paganism

Religious practices: Very diverse traditions so you should ask the patient for any specific requirements.

Diet: Most pagans prefer organic food and free-range reared meat, while many are vegetarian/vegan.

Fasting: No organised fast days.

Personal Hygiene: No specific requirements.

Modesty and dress: No specific requirements.

Death and Dying: Most pagans believe in reincarnation and will wish to know when they are dying so that they may consciously prepare for it. There are no specific rituals.

Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation: No objection.

Sikhism

Religious practices: Pray in the morning and evening and are expected to recite hymns when they have time in the day.

Diet: Usually vegetarian. Eggs, fish and any ingredients with animal derivatives or cooked in animal fat will also be excluded. Dairy produce is acceptable providing it is free from animal fat. Some Sikhs will only eat food prepared by their families. Non-vegetarian Sikhs will only eat meat that has been slaughtered according to their own rites (not halal or kosher).

Fasting: None.

Personal Hygiene: Prefer to wash in free flowing water. Prefer to wash with water after using the toilet. Will want to wash hands and mouth before meals. Hair is uncut but should be kept clean and tidy. Help with this would be welcomed.

Modesty and dress: Women will prefer female staff. Women may not want to wear a gown as it is short. Sikh men always have their uncut hair in a turban and Sikh women wear a long Punjabi scarf. You should be particularly sensitive about removing these as they are worn to maintain the sanctity of the Kesh (hair) and is treated with the utmost respect.

Death customs: When dying, a Sikh patient is comforted by reciting hymns from the Sikh Holy Scriptures. After death, the body should be covered with a plain white sheet or shroud. The eyes and mouth should be closed and limbs straightened with arms placed beside the body. Nursing staff must ensure that none of the five articles of faith on the body are disturbed. The beard and hair must not be trimmed and the hair on the head should be kept covered. Most Sikhs are cremated. Cremation should take place as soon as possible after death and friends and relatives will prepare the body the night before at the funeral parlour.

Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation: No objection usually.