

Information for Health Care Providers when Dealing with a Muslim Patient

1. DEFINITIONS, BELIEFS & PRACTICES:

1.1. Islam & Muslims:

The word Islam is an Arabic word which means submission and peace.

Followers of Islam are called Muslims which literally means: those who submit to the will of God.

Allah is the name of God in Arabic.

The Qur'an is the sacred book for Muslims. It is the word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

The culture of Muslims is deeply rooted in their religion.

1.2. Beliefs (Articles of Faith):

Muslims believe in One God; in the Angels created by Him; in the Prophets through whom His Revelations were brought to humankind; in Life after Death and the Day of Judgement; in God's complete authority over human Destiny.

1.3. Practices:

The principal practices of Islam are called the five pillars of Islam. These are:

1.3.1. The "Shahada" or Declaration of Faith: To say and believe that there is no divinity but Allah, and that Muhammad is the Messenger "Prophet" of Allah. The implications of this testimony is that one accepts to follow the guidance of God and that of God's final messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

1.3.2. "Salat" or Prayer: Muslims pray five times a day at morning, noon, afternoon, sunset and night. Before the prayer, washing "ablution" is performed in a special manner.

1.3.3. "Zakat" or Welfare Tax: Once a year a Muslim must give a portion of his/her wealth to the poor, needy, to those in debt, to the wayfarer and the likes.

1.3.4. Fasting: The annual fast of the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is obligatory upon an adult Muslim who is not sick or a traveller. From dawn to sunset the Muslim refrains from eating, drinking, smoking, marital relation.

1.3.5. The Hajj "Pilgrimage" to Makkah (in Saudi Arabia): At least once in a lifetime if one is physically and financially capable.

2. FOOD THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED:

All cuts of pork are strictly forbidden for Muslims to eat. Although Muslims are permitted to eat meat of animals (sheep, goats and oxen) and chicken slaughtered by a Muslim, Christian or Jews, however, since animals in this country are killed by being stunned, the meat becomes unsuitable for Muslims to consume. The alternative would be to provide fish or "Halal" meat and chicken (slaughtered in the Muslim way), Kosher or vegetarian food.

Halal meat is available from several shops in Dublin including the shop of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (within the complex of the Dublin Mosque on South Circular Road, Dublin 8.) There are Halal shops elsewhere in Ireland which sell Halal meat. All

the meat available in non-Halal shops and supermarkets is unsuitable for Muslims to eat.

3. FASTING; WHEN AND HOW LONG:

Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The Islamic calendar is based on the cycle of the moon. There are 354 days in the Islamic calendar (compared to 365¼ days in the Georgian calendar), and as a result Ramadan comes 11 days earlier every year. The fasting person refrains from eating, drinking and smoking from dawn to sunset. Although a sick person is permitted to break the fast, some patients who feel that they can do it, might wish to fast. This means going without anything via mouth, nose, PR, IM, S/C, routes from dawn to sunset.

4. HYGIENE REQUIREMENTS:

Muslims are particular about bodily cleanliness after visiting the toilet using both tissue paper and water to clean themselves. For patients using bedpans water or wet wipes should be provided as cleaning the private parts after answering the call of nature is a stipulation of the religion

5. PREFERENCES ON DYING & PROCEDURE AFTER DEATH:

Muslims are urged to seek forgiveness and mercy from God and to affirm the unity of God before death. They do not need a ‘minister’ to carry out this out.

Family members and friends of the dying person may wish to be present at the time of his/her death to read some prayers. The dying person or his/her family may want a mosque leader to recite a prayer at the time of death.

The eyes of the deceased should be closed immediately after death, the lower jaw tied in place with a strip and the body covered with a sheet. No nails or hair should be cut. Prior or soon after death, the Islamic Foundation of Ireland/Mosque should be contacted at 01-4533242. The Dublin Mosque will arrange for removal and burial.

6- PROCEDURE AT DEATH:

The body is laid on a flat board (trolley), feet together; arms to the side, eyes closed and chin wrapped in a cloth to prevent the mouth from opening. The body is washed in a special way by the family.

N.B. The body should be washed by some Muslims. A deceased man is washed by men and a deceased woman by women. It is shrouded in white linen

7- FUNERAL AND MOURNING:

The dead should be buried as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours. A short ritual prayer for the dead is performed at the mosque with family and friends praying for the deceased and asking forgiveness for his/her sins. Muslims are always buried and never cremated.

8- GENERAL INFORMATION:

- The five daily prayers are very important for Muslims. A Muslim should pray standing, however, if one cannot stand then one can pray while sitting or even lying in bed. Allow them to pray standing, if they can. In this case they would need some “clean” space as the prayer involves standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting.
- Provide same gender doctor/nurse to the Muslim patient if possible.

- Take time to explain tests, procedures and treatment. Many Muslims are new immigrants and may have a language problem.
- Respect their modesty and privacy. Some examinations can be done over a gown.
- Blood transfusion is allowed after proper screening.
- Maintaining a terminal patient on artificial life support for a prolonged period in a vegetative state is not encouraged.
- Autopsy is not permitted unless required by law.

For further information contact:
Islamic Foundation of Ireland,
163 South Circular Road,
Dublin 8. Tel. 01-4533242.