

Caring for a Muslim Patient with Mental Health Problems

Religion: Islam

Participants: Muslims

Basic elements: the Five Pillars:

PILLAR ONE: The Declaration of Faith (**SHAHADA**), by verbally promising the following: "I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammad is His Prophet and Messenger".

PILLAR TWO: The five daily prayers (**SALAT**), which are mandatory.

PILLAR THREE: Fasting (**SAWM**) during the holy month of Ramadan. For one month the faithful abstain from food and drink, from sunrise to sunset.

PILLAR FOUR: Almsgiving (**ZAKAT**)

PILLAR FIVE: Pilgrimage to Mecca at least on one occasion in one's lifetime (**HAJJ**)

View of Mental Illness

It is recognised that people will have psychiatric illnesses and that due to serious illness sometimes people will not be able to perform their religious obligations and may also do things contrary to their religious beliefs.

A belief in predestination teaches the individual not to feel guilty or take the blame for these things, but rather to let them go and do their best in the future.

View of Medication

Imams encourage people to take medication prescribed by Doctors. There is no religious reason for not taking prescribed medications. These should be taken even in times of fasting.

View of the Spiritual World

Muslims believe in one Creator God (Allah), and life after death. Many believe that death is the will of Allah, and should be accepted as such. They also believe in the existence of Satan and other spirits associated with Satan called Jins. They believe that people can become possessed by Jins but that this is not common. It is advised that anyone thinking they maybe possessed should first seek medical assessment in case the symptoms are due to mental illness. If necessary, after this, they can seek the help of an Imam who can say special prayers.

Please speak to the Chaplain if you have concerns in this regard.

Religious Practises

Prayer

Practising adult Muslims are required to pray five times daily: before sunrise, at noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and at night.

The mentally ill are exempt from the prayers. Others who are exempt include other seriously ill people, women up to 40 days after child birth and menstruating women.

If a Muslim patient is seeking to pray they need:

- access to running water for ritual washing before prayer,
- a clean space for the prayers. The prayer mat is not necessary, but can provide the clean surface if necessary. A pillow-slip or towel can be used instead. Patients can also offer prayer in a bed or chair.
- To face the direction of Mecca if possible (in the UK, in a South-Easterly direction). This can be found easily with a "Qibla" app on a smart phone.

Friday Prayers

- If possible a Muslim patient should be facilitated to attend Friday prayers at the Mosque.
- For female patients, first check that the local Mosque accommodates women.
- Female members of staff escorting patients should wear long sleeved tops and trousers, and take a scarf for covering the head.
- Staff will be required to remove footwear on entering the Mosque.
- Staff (male or female) are permitted to sit at the side of the prayer room whilst prayers take place. The service may take around 2 hours.

Fasting

Practising adult Muslims are required to fast in the month of RAMADAN from sunrise to sunset, during which period there is no intake of any food or drink. The time of Ramadan moves back about 10 days each year. The end of it is marked by the feast of Eid, which is one of the most important times in the Muslim calendar.

The seriously mentally ill are exempt from fasting, as are other seriously ill people, pregnant or breast-feeding mothers, menstruating women, and people who are on a journey and the elderly if they are in poor health.

If someone who is fasting becomes unwell due to the fast they are allowed to take food and water.

If a Muslim patient is observing Ramadan, every effort should be taken to provide the appropriate hot food during the times when they can eat (i.e. sunset, and two hours before sunrise).

The Quran and other religious artefacts

The QURAN is Muslims' Holy Scripture.

Faith Notes - Islam

Reading and listening to the Quran is regarded as a treatment in itself. For those in mental distress Chapter One is particularly recommended. Versions of the Quran given to patients should just be in English text in case it is misused. (It is the Arabic text which is especially held as sacred).

The Quran should be treated with great respect. Non-Muslims are allowed to handle the Quran but should wash their hands first. Other religious artefacts such as prayer beads may also be handled by non-Muslims, but again, after hand-washing.

As depictions of people, and specifically eyes (where human or animal) are prohibited in Islam, such images should not be in display in a Prayer Room.

Activities of Living

Food

Muslims eat HALAL meat. This means the animals that have been killed using a special procedure and had special prayers said at the time of slaughter. Practising Muslims do not eat pork, or food cooked in animal fat. They do not drink alcohol. Vegetarian cheese can be included in the menu. If *halal* meat is not available, then the patient may be given a vegetarian meal.

Hygiene

Muslims prefer to wash in running water, so a shower is preferred to a bath. After using the toilet, Muslims will wish to wash themselves, and a jug or container filled with water will be required. For patients who are confined to bed, water should be offered after the use of a bed-pan, and not just toilet paper. Muslims use the left hand for 'unclean' tasks, such as washing after using the toilet, and the right hand for 'clean' tasks like eating. Most Muslims shave their pubic hair and also under the arms. Washing before prayers (ablution) is required.

Dress

All Muslims, both male and female, are very modest in their dress. Some women will cover their heads.

Male/Female communications

A female Muslim would prefer a female doctor or consultant to attend to her, and if this is not possible she may request that her husband should be present during medical examinations. Muslim women should not be placed in mixed sex wards. Male health care workers should not use a female's first name, or female care worker's a male's first name without specific invitation. It is not considered proper for men and women to have prolonged eye contact, so when communicating with a Muslim patient of the opposite sex, avert eyes every-now-and-again.

Rites of Passage

Birth

A 'call to prayer' is whispered into the baby's right and then left ear by the father or a male relative as soon as possible after birth, so that this is the first sound that the baby hears. Muslim babies are normally bathed before being handed to the mother. On the sixth or seventh day the baby's head is

shaved as a symbol of removing the impurities of birth, and the naming of the baby also takes place, by a relative who is present. (Sometimes this may be postponed if the grandparents are abroad). All Muslim boys are circumcised, usually within four weeks of birth. Traditionally this is performed in the first few days after birth. Some families do not allow the mother to leave the house until 40 days after giving birth, and, if this is the case, she may not attend the clinic during this period.

Death

Care of the Dying:

Muslims believe in life after death and many believe that death is the will of Allah, and should be accepted as such. Patients who are dying may wish to sit or lie facing Mecca. Family and friends may sit with the patient, quietly reading verses from the Holy Qur'an. The patient may request to be visited by a religious representative from the local Mosque.

After death:

Many Muslims prefer the body not to be touched by a non-Muslim after death. If it is necessary for a non-Muslim to touch the body, disposable gloves should be used.

In the event of death, place the foot of the patient's bed facing Mecca, or turn the patient onto their right side and position the bed so that the deceased's face looks towards Mecca. This simple act would greatly comfort the bereaved relatives. Please leave a light on until the body is moved. Do not wash the body or cut nails, as the family will perform this; just wrap the body in a plain white sheet.

The Mosque in Gravesend has facility for the required ritualistic post-death washing.

Viewing by relatives:

No religious symbols should be on permanent display in the viewing room. Relatives may wish to provide a religious symbol for the duration of the viewing.

The deceased should be positioned so that the face looks towards Mecca.

Funerals:

Muslims are always buried, never cremated and burial should take place as soon as possible after death, preferably the next day. A Muslim undertaker, Central or Local Mosque should be contacted by the family who will handle all procedures including the washing of the body and prayers at the Mosque. If the deceased Muslim has no family, then the local Mosque should be contacted.

Post-mortems:

Muslims may be reluctant to have a post-mortem, but there are no religious objections if the law requires one.

Organ Donation:

Under Islamic law it is the practice for bodies to be buried intact, with all their organs. However recent interpretation by the Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK has made the donation of organs and also transplants, permissible. The Council now supports organ transplants as a means of alleviating pain and saving life on the basis of the rules of the Shariah.

Muslims may carry donor cards. However, the next of kin of a dead person, in the absence of a donor card or an expressed wish of the dead person to donate his/her organs, may give permission to obtain organs from the body to save other people's lives.

Faith in a wider context

Contacting local Mosque.

The Chaplaincy Department recommends that if a patient requests staff to contact a local faith leader, this is referred back to the Chaplain. It maybe that initially the patient's needs can be more appropriately met "in-house" and if not, we have a data base of appropriate community leaders to contact.

Concerns about Extremism

All mainstream Muslims will acclaim Islam as a religion of peace and reject acts of violence done in the name of their religion. If you have cause to be concerned that a patient is expressing radical, extreme and/or violent ideas please consult with the Chaplain and the safe-guarding team. It maybe that a referral under the Government's PREVENT strategy is required.

