



Health Care and Religious Beliefs



LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SYSTEM



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Forward

Health care continues to mature. The evidence is all around us. Thirty years ago, patient care was largely thought to involve simply the correct application of medical science to disease. Today, however, we know that “an ounce of prevention” is often better than a “pound of intervention.”

We also know now, more clearly than ever before, that spirituality matters to health outcomes. The fact that we are offering health care in what scholar Diana Eck has called the most religiously diverse nation in the history of the world means that American health care now has both unprecedented opportunities and challenges. A significant question for all of us who aspire to provide the best quality of health care is this: How can we offer our patients, with their rich diversity of religious backgrounds, care that is spiritually nurturing and culturally competent?

The little booklet you are holding is an attempt to help busy health care professionals begin to answer this question. Led by a nurse who specializes in spiritual care, a team of writers has produced this brief introduction to some of our culture’s distinctive faith communities. No one imagines, of course, that such concise descriptions of complex religious traditions represent detailed scholarly analyses. The booklet’s purpose is more modest – to open windows on key elements of faith traditions so that patients who belong to these traditions may receive more considerate care.

Each description in this work has been reviewed by scholars with knowledge of comparative religions. Nevertheless, words of caution are in order. We know there is usually vast diversity within the various faith traditions. Religions typically have their own identifiable branches. And individual members often differ in their beliefs and practices from their religion’s official teachings. What this means for those using this handbook is that the descriptions given here should be viewed as a high-level map. The fine-grained details will need to be filled in by patients and their families.

Because of increasing awareness of the importance of spirituality for patient care, it has become common to take a “spiritual history.” The primary accreditor of health care institutions now expects this information to be documented, and various approaches for gathering this information have been advocated. In essence, there are two questions for which answers are needed if we are to provide spiritually sensitive care: What does the patient want us to know about his or her spiritual needs and resources? And what difference does the patient want this information to make in the way we provide care? As with all history taking, finding the answers to these questions may be done skillfully or clumsily. The knowledge provided in this booklet offers readers an opportunity to increase skill in attending to patients’ religious and spiritual stories.

This handbook has come to life on the campus of an educational institution that exemplifies religious and cultural diversity. Students of the health professions come to Loma Linda University from over eighty nations. They naturally bring with them the cultural and religious heritage of their home countries. This means that we continually need to teach what our University calls “whole person care” to a highly diverse population of students who are learning to give care to a richly diverse population of patients. In such an environment, any effort to increase the understanding of religious diversity should be welcomed.

That is why we celebrate the appearance of this booklet. Our plan is to revise and expand it over time so it will contribute ever more effectively to caring for the wholeness of patients and their families.

We believe that every patient who comes to our medical center is a gift to us. We are convinced that each patient deserves our respectful understanding as we pursue our mission “to continue the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus Christ.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerald Winslow". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

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Christian Scientists

Overview of Beliefs

Christian Science is based on the teachings of Jesus. It presents God as all-powerful, ever-present, and all-good, and each person as inseparable from His love. In Christian Science, it is the unfolding understanding of this reality that brings about healing.

The most complete explanation of Christian Science can be found in *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy. Eddy discovered Christian Science in 1866 and later founded The Church of Christ, Scientist, which today has members and branches throughout the world.

Christian Scientists believe that healing does not come from within the body or from a person's mind, but from God's Mind, which is used as one of the seven synonyms for God. There are no ordained clergy in the church, but lay Christian Science practitioners provide a prayer healing ministry for members and the public.

Overview of Health and Illness

Fundamental to the practice of Christian Science is an appreciation of every individual's unique relationship with God, and an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each person's spiritual journey. Nothing in Christian Science teaching or practice supports or justifies interference with an individual's prerogative to make decisions about his or her health care or any other aspect of daily life.

Consequently, questions relating to diagnosis, treatment, birth, death, or any other issue arising in the health care setting are always answered on an individual/family basis. A Christian Scientist who enters a medical care facility voluntarily will likely accept conventional medical treatment. He or she may ask that drugs and therapy be kept to a minimum.

Regardless of the question at hand, be it blood transfusion, organ transplantation, or abortion, Christian Scientists and their families make their own decisions.

Many Christian Scientists, however, do not believe in any medical interventions and are usually only in a hospital for births, broken bones, or because of an accident. Some of them are opposed to all medications, including pain relief, while others believe in some medical treatments. Some Christian Scientist parents believe they have the right to refuse medical treatment on behalf of their children. However, when there is a strong difference of opinion between medical authorities and parents, the church's policy is to strongly encourage the parents to cooperate with the authorities. The church supports the reporting of communicable diseases, vaccination, and the provision of care during the birth of a child.¹

Birth

The birth of a baby is the most common reason a Christian Science believer enters the hospital. Christian Scientists do not see birth as a medical condition, but a natural event. They may choose not to receive any medication and may wish their baby to not receive any medical interventions after birth. There is no church position on the termination of a pregnancy.

Death and Grief

In Christian Science, there are no specified end of life rites. The approach to this situation remains an individual/family decision. In a case of incapacity, it should be explored whether or not a Christian Scientist has legally empowered another individual to make health care decisions on his or her behalf. Many Christian Scientists will have taken this step without consulting a medical professional.

Questions relating to disposition of the body should be answered by the family.

Diet

Christian Scientists do not follow any particular diet, although they do abstain from alcohol and tobacco and may not drink tea or coffee.²

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Talk with the patient to find out what level of medical care they wish to receive.
- ♦ Facilitate contact with a Christian Science practitioner. A worldwide directory is available at www.churchofchristscientist.org/worldwidedirectory.

- ♦ Offer the patient time and a quiet space to pray.
- ♦ Abide by a patient's request to decline some aspects of care.

Medical Treatment

- ♦ For many members, no medical treatment is considered acceptable, unless there are broken bones.
- ♦ Dental treatment is acceptable. The use of pain medication is left to the individual.
- ♦ Blood products, blood transfusions, drugs, organ donation, and life support are generally not acceptable, although the decision will be made by the individual.

Eastern Orthodox

Overview of Beliefs

The Eastern Orthodox Church (also known by its geographical centers: Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc.) has its roots in the New Testament Church among Christ's disciples. It currently has several Patriarchates in the United States and throughout the world. The term "Eastern" Orthodox stems from the split that occurred in 1054 when the Patriarch of Rome (the center of the western half of Constantine's empire) excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople (the center of the eastern half of the empire). The Roman Catholic Church now represents the western church, while the Eastern Orthodox Churches represent the remaining Patriarchates of the church, primarily headquartered in the East.

The Orthodox Church confesses the Nicene Creed, and believes in the Holy Trinity — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — three divine persons in one God, distinct yet not separate.

Orthodox Christians believe that humans were created in the image and likeness of God, and were united to God. At Adam and Eve's fall, that union was corrupted, bringing sin and death to the created world. Despite the fall, God's image remains in people, and salvation is the process of reestablishing union with Christ. The impact of sin on the soul and body, and on a person's relationship with God, is the focus of healing. The Church is viewed as a "hospital for souls," in which prayer, participation in community, and the Sacraments are treatments for the illnesses which plague us. Sacraments include Baptism, Repentance (Confession and Forgiveness), Communion, and Holy Unction (prayers for the sick). The healing of soul and body are directly tied to each other since the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Illness of the body and human suffering is believed to have sublime redemptive purposes, and, while being reasonably treated medically, are to be plumbed for spiritual benefit.

Overview of Health and Illness

St. Basil offers a statement on the approach Orthodox Christians take towards medicine: “The medical art has been vouchsafed (granted to) us by God, who directs our whole life, as a model for the cure of the soul.”³ We must be receptive to God so we can experience His grace that can heal both body and soul. The important thing is not to expect healing, but to be open to God’s will. Medical practitioners are considered administrators of God’s healing, since all healing comes from God.

Birth

Orthodox Christians request that a priest read prayers before and after the birth of a child. If there is a miscarriage or the child dies soon after birth, a priest should be called to pray for the child and parents.

Death and Grief

While Orthodox Christians believe in life eternal for the soul, the death of the body

brings grief to the deceased person’s loved ones. A priest should be notified to pray for the soul of the person who died, and to discuss arrangements with the family for funeral and burial. Orthodox Christians pray for the souls of their departed for forty days, and perform memorial prayer services for the consolation of the grieving as well as the departed. Great care should be taken with the body of the deceased. This includes miscarried pregnancies.

Cremation is categorically forbidden by the Orthodox Church. Practices such as embalming, autopsy, and dissection of the body are discouraged, but not forbidden.

Diet

Orthodox Christians have no restrictions on their diet. Fasting from certain foods, however, is used to strengthen the soul over the passions of the body and to encourage prayer. At certain times of the year and prior to *Pascha* (Easter), there are fasting periods when Orthodox may avoid certain foods.

Do's and Don'ts

There are no specific prohibitions, but decisions are left up to the individual.

There are a great variety of customs within the Orthodox Church, depending on ethnic culture, local traditions, and whether or not the person converted to Orthodoxy or was raised within the church.

Medical Treatment

- ♦ There are very few constraints on medical interventions for the purpose of improving physical health, as long as they do not contribute to or cause harm to others.
- ♦ Certain fertility interventions (especially those that include the destruction of fertilized eggs or surrogate pregnancies), should be avoided.
- ♦ Abortion and euthanasia are considered murder.
- ♦ Removal of “artificial” nutrition or hydration is not acceptable.
- ♦ Implantation of animal organs and fetal cell research are not allowed.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Overview of Beliefs

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in one God, Jehovah, who created the universe. They believe His first creation was His son Christ Jesus through whom all other creation was made. They believe that Jesus agreed to come to the earth as a human to ransom what was lost for mankind by Adam's disobedience. They encourage strong family relationships, but avoid all association with politics. The commands of God given in the Bible are considered superior to all other laws and commands.

Overview of Health and Illness

Jehovah's Witnesses believe illnesses of mind and body are inherited from Adam, since he lost perfection and could not pass on life free of illness to his offspring. They seek medical care when sick and many work in health care.

They believe that the Bible does not require prolongation of life without regard to quality.

Death and Grief

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the soul ceases to exist after death and that there is no consciousness in death. They believe in the promised resurrection of 144,000 to reign as kings and priests in heaven, while the rest of the dead will be resurrected to life on earth.

There are no special rituals associated with death. Autopsies are acceptable. Cremation and burial are equally satisfactory alternatives.

Diet

Jehovah's Witnesses are required to abstain from eating blood and the meat of animals from which blood has not been properly drained. Aside from this Biblical injunction, there are no restrictions on what can be eaten.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from tobacco and nonprescription drugs. The moderate use of wine and other alcoholic beverages is allowed. Scriptural principles of moderation and respect for one's

life and mental faculties rule out substance abuse (e.g., tobacco and recreational drugs). The medical use of drugs, including narcotics for severe pain, under the supervision of a physician, is a personal matter.

- ♦ Each couple privately and responsibly determines if they will employ appropriate methods of family planning. However, Witnesses avoid contraceptive methods that are abortive.
- ♦ Deliberately induced abortion simply to avoid the birth of an unwanted child is the willful taking of human life and hence is unacceptable to Jehovah's Witnesses. If, at the time of childbirth, a choice must be made between the life of the mother and that of the child, it is up to the individuals concerned to make that decision.
- ♦ Birthdays, Easter, and Christmas are not celebrated due to pagan origins.

Medical Treatment

- ♦ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that blood transfusion is prohibited by Biblical passages. As a result, they will not accept transfusion of whole blood, red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. However, refusing a

blood transfusion does not mean Jehovah's Witnesses are against treatment. There are many effective medical alternatives to blood transfusion.

- ♦ Jehovah's Witnesses view in vitro fertilization involving the egg and sperm from persons who are not married to each other as comparable to adultery and thus unacceptable. Gestational surrogacy is also unacceptable.
- ♦ The religious understanding of Jehovah's Witnesses does not absolutely prohibit the use of blood fractions, such as clotting factors, immune globulin, interferon, platelet-derived wound-healing factor, and serum made with a blood fraction.
- ♦ Hemodialysis, if no blood prime is used, is a matter for each Witness patient to decide on their own.
- ♦ Witnesses are encouraged to make a thoughtful personal decision regarding whether or not to accept hemodilution.
- ♦ While the Bible specifically forbids consuming blood, no command pointedly forbids the taking in of tissue or bone from another human. Therefore, whether to accept an organ transplant is a personal medical decision.

Latter-day Saints

Overview of Beliefs

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) is composed of about twelve million members worldwide. Members believe in God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints considers itself Christian, but is neither Catholic nor Protestant. As taught by the church, the first principles and ordinances of the gospel are: 1) faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, 2) repentance, 3) baptism by immersion, and 4) laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Children are not baptized until the age of 8, when they become accountable for their actions. The *Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* is regarded as divinely inspired scripture, as is the Holy Bible and several other specific books.

The church embraces the moral standards taught by Jesus Christ, including personal honesty, integrity, obedience to law, chastity outside of marriage, and fidelity within marriage.

Overview of Health and Illness

A health code revealed to Joseph Smith in 1833 cautions against using tobacco or consuming alcohol, tea, or coffee. It also emphasizes the positive benefits of wise eating habits and both physical and spiritual fitness. The church interprets the misuse of drugs—illegal, legal, prescription, or controlled—as a violation of their health code.

Birth

Members value family very highly. There are no special rituals or beliefs surrounding birth.

Death

There are no special services or rituals at the time of death.

Diet

Meat is not against the health code, but members are counseled to eat all things sparingly.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Include the family in decision-making as much as possible, according to the wishes of the patient.
- ♦ Remember to ask if someone from their church should be called.
- ♦ Members of the church have a strong belief in the priesthood, or the authority to act in God's name on earth. They will frequently request priesthood blessings by Elders of the church when they become ill or have other medical needs.

Medical Treatment

- ♦ Blood transfusions, organ donations, and autopsies are up to individual choice.
- ♦ Birth control is acceptable according to the individual.
- ♦ The church is against abortion except in the case of incest or rape, if the health of the mother is in serious jeopardy, or the baby is not expected to survive beyond birth.⁴
- ♦ Members may take medicines that contain alcohol or caffeine (which are normally restricted items), as long as they are not using the medicines just for those ingredients and do not become addicted to them.

Protestants

Overview of Beliefs

Protestant Christians believe in the Trinity and the sovereignty of God. They believe that God forgives freely and will save all who accept the gift of Jesus' death for salvation.

Prayer is a method of communicating with God, thanking Him for His gifts and letting Him know of specific needs or concerns.

Christians look forward to a time when they will live forever with God. Beliefs about the events leading up to that time vary among denominations.

Overview of Health and Illness

Most protestant churches emphasize the importance of individual well-being and relationships. Health practices should support improvement of the whole person, including the mind, body, and spirit. Beliefs about the meaning and cause of suffering and the importance of spiritual practices will vary among denominations.

Birth

This is usually a time of great celebration and thanksgiving. If a child is stillborn or if there is a miscarriage, some may wish to have the child baptized.

Death and Grief

Some Christians have religious practices of anointing with oil or other such rituals. Many will appreciate the reading of scripture and/or prayer.

Some traditions teach that as soon as a person dies, their soul goes to heaven where they live with God, family, and friends who died before. Others believe that people who die cease to exist until Jesus comes to this earth and resurrects all the dead who have accepted Him. They will then be taken to heaven to live with God.

Diet

Dietary practices vary with religions. Some are vegetarian. Some have days of fasting for certain religious celebrations.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Organ donation is acceptable.
- ♦ Withdrawal of treatment and end of life issues vary from person to person.
- ♦ High value is placed on life as long as the quality is good.
- ♦ Spiritual practices may include scripture reading, prayer, offerings, anointing, and the Eucharist.

Medical Treatments

- ♦ While certain faith groups may have suggestions and restrictions, there are no general guidelines for Protestant Christians when it comes to treatment.

Roman Catholics

Overview of Beliefs

The Bishop of Rome, also known as the Pope, heads the Roman Catholic Church, the most populous Christian church. The Catholic Church has a long history of development in concert with Western civilization. It maintains the basic Christian tenets of faith, including the Holy Trinity and the effect of Adam and Eve's fall from their original sinless state at creation. Catholics believe that the salvific actions of Jesus Christ redeemed creation from the effects of original sin and established Christianity, the Bible, and tradition as the standards of faith and belief.

The Catholic Church believes it has the authority and responsibility to be a conduit for God's grace of salvation, healing, and wholeness through prayer and the seven Sacraments, such as Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, and the Eucharist.

Overview of Health and Illness

Illness is part of our human experience on earth. Human beings get sick because they are flesh and blood. Catholics are encouraged to join their pain, sickness, and sorrow with that of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Sacrament of the Sick confers grace on those who are anointed to be able to bear their pain and suffering while trusting God who is very involved in every step of their journey through pain. Catholics believe that pain, suffering, and sickness are not punishments from God. They also believe in the intercession of their patron saints and other saints to whom they are devoted. Catholics believe that medication and treatment are ways and means of cooperating with the grace of God for relief and healing.

Birth

Roman Catholics affirm that life begins at conception, and therefore any birth control methods or medical interventions that interfere with the life of an unborn child are strictly forbidden. If, however, a mother undergoes any medical procedure necessary for life that results in the loss of her fetus, she is not held accountable for the loss of life. In the event of the death of an unborn child, the parents may seek the prayers of the church. A priest, deacon, lay minister, or family member may lead these prayers.

If an infant has a poor prognosis, baptism is very important. Baptism can be performed by any Christian and reported to the family if they are not present at the time.

Death and Grief

The end of a person's life on earth is believed to be the time when the body separates from the soul. At this point, a person's soul receives immediate judgment, and proceeds to heaven, hell, or purgatory. Grieving loved ones are encouraged to pray for the soul of the deceased person, thereby lessening and mitigating their time in purgatory. Loved ones may also

request that a Mass be offered for the soul of the departed. In addition, donations may also be given in the name of the deceased person.

Diet

Catholics have no dietary restrictions. Abstinence from meat on Fridays is encouraged, but it is only required during Lent. This practice is considered an act of love and solidarity with Christ's suffering and crucifixion. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are the only days during the year when fasting is required.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Catholics appreciate the Sacrament of the Sick when they are in the hospital. Both Catholic patients and their loved ones will want a priest to visit, pray, anoint, and give Holy Communion to the patient and family.
- ♦ Catholics are urged to protect and support the gift of life. They do this by refusing to participate in interventions or techniques which destroy life or sacrifice the marital bond, such as:
 - ~ Embryonic cell research

Medical Treatment

- ♦ Catholics are encouraged to protect life at its end by refusing euthanasia, and by carefully weighing the decision to participate in medical treatment beyond ordinary care. Rev. John Balluff states, “Death is not the answer to be sought or intended but neither is it to be avoided at all costs. The nature of life, including its sufferings, can prepare us for God and natural death is the final step towards the eternal context of human life.”⁵
- ♦ Infertility treatments that involve persons outside the married couple (such as donated sperm or ovum) or which place the power of creation of life in the hands of technology and remove it from the conjugal act and God’s will are not acceptable.

Seventh-day Adventists

Overview of Beliefs

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of many Christian communities of faith. Members treasure the knowledge that they are loved and accepted by the Creator God. The denomination was organized in the mid-1800's and chose the name based on the observance of the seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath and a belief in the second coming or "advent" of Jesus. The Bible is the source of their beliefs.

The Sabbath is observed from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. This is a very special day to put aside work, secular pursuits, and self-interests—a day to shut out the pressures of everyday life in order to receive the needed gifts of peace and rest. It is a time to worship the Creator and commune with Him.⁶

Overview of Health and Illness

The church teaches that our bodies are God's temple (1Cor. 6:19). This leads to a special desire to care for one's health by exercising and eating a balanced diet.

From the church's founding in the 1860's, there has been a strong presence in health care. Many Adventists choose to work in health care and many churches offer seminars and classes on healthful living.

Birth

The family unit tends to be strong among Seventh-day Adventists. Birth is a joyous time, celebrated by all generations. In the first few months after birth, many parents have their babies dedicated to God in a church service. In the case of a serious illness, parents may wish their baby to be dedicated in the hospital.

Death and Grief

Adventists believe that death is like sleep during which the person has no conscious form of existence until the resurrection when Jesus returns to this earth. It is important to refer to the person who died as being dead or asleep, rather than in heaven with God.

There are no special rituals associated with death. Autopsies are acceptable. Cremation and burial are equally satisfactory alternatives.

Diet

Because of the desire to keep one's body healthy, many Adventists adhere to a vegetarian diet. They also refrain from alcohol and caffeinated beverages. Those members who are not vegetarian will refrain from pork, shellfish, and other meats that are unclean, according to the laws in Leviticus.

Do's and Don'ts

- ✦ Many who are seriously ill will wish for prayer and anointing by a pastor or church elder.
- ✦ The sanctity of human life is valued. Because of that, the church does not condone abortions for reasons of birth control, gender selection, or convenience. However, the personal liberty of women is guarded and supported.⁷

Medical Treatment

- ✦ Some members choose to use herbal therapies in conjunction with traditional medicine.
- ✦ Seventh-day Adventists value human life as a gift from God and support the use of medical treatment to prolong life. However, it is permissible to discontinue treatment if the burdens outweigh the benefits.
- ✦ The church is opposed to active euthanasia and assisted suicide.⁸

Buddhists

Overview of Beliefs

Buddhism is one of the four largest religions in the world. It is more of a spiritual practice than a set of doctrines. Several concepts are central to Buddhism. The Four Noble Truths deal with the existence and cause of suffering. The last of the Noble Truths explains that suffering can be eliminated by following the Eightfold Path. Principles taught in the Eightfold Path are:

- 1) accept the Four Noble Truths,
- 2) renounce the pleasures of the senses and harbor no ill will toward anyone,
- 3) do not lie, slander, or abuse anyone,
- 4) do not destroy any living creature and take only what is given to you,
- 5) earn your livelihood in a way that harms no one,
- 6) prevent evil from arising in you and strive to acquire good qualities,
- 7) be observant, alert, contemplative, and free of desire and sorrow, and
- 8) meditate.

Buddhists believe that life is basically full of pain, ultimately unsatisfying and temporary. By conditioning the mind and following the Eightfold Path, one can find peace in this life,

escape the continuing cycle of reincarnation, and attain nirvana. Quality of life is more important than quantity.

Buddhists have traditionally been found primarily in Southeast Asia, with each country having its own set of cultural beliefs mingled with religious practices. Many Westerners are now adopting Buddhist practices, although they generally ignore the cultural parts.

Overview of Health and Illness

Some Buddhists believe that a spiritually focused person will not become sick. If illness does occur, most believe that a cure can be obtained by thinking correctly or using herbs. Some believe that if they expose their body to harsh natural elements, they are less likely to get sick because their immune system will be strengthened.

Buddhists strive to develop the mind to its fullest potential, which means practicing compassion and wisdom. They strive to understand and work with suffering and illness so it can bring

about the most good for their spiritual growth.

Buddhists believe that men and women are equal, but because mothers are responsible for bringing children into the world, they are given extra attention and kindness.

Birth

Buddhists believe in rebirth. Because of this, human birth is considered to be the very special time when a consciousness enters the womb to be reborn.

Death

The time of death is considered the transition point to the next life for Buddhists. They believe that if one dies in a good state of mind, he or she is more likely to have a favorable rebirth. As a result, it is very important to provide a quiet environment for the dying person. Family and friends may assist in reciting mantras or prayers to help maintain a good state of mind.

After death, Buddhists believe a person's consciousness enters a Bardo, a temporary spirit body, while waiting for the next life. Immediately after physical death, it is best to keep the body quiet and peaceful. Usually, the body is kept in a home for three days, but

it is not touched. Prayers are said during this time to help the person achieve the best rebirth possible.

Candles and incense may play a major role in mourning. This facilitates the process of the person's consciousness letting go of its prior body and all attachments so it can more easily move to the next life.

In the hospital, family members may desire that the body not be disturbed for as long as possible and may wish to wash and wrap the body. Autopsies may be permitted after a period of time if the religious leader determines that the soul has left the body. Cremation is often preferred and is done five days after death. A memory service is then held forty-nine days after death.

Diet

Buddhists care for their bodies by eating moderately and abstaining from alcohol and drugs since these products decrease mental clarity. Within various groups, there are both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Some groups have strict dietary codes but other groups have few. Many, however, will not eat any animals because of the sanctity they place on life, and they will not intentionally kill any living being.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Daily devotions include prayer, mantras, and a variety of meditation practices.
- ♦ A quiet environment is valued.
- ♦ Organ donation is acceptable to some.
- ♦ Blood donation is considered honorable.
- ♦ Physical contact with the opposite sex is not allowed for monks and nuns.

Medical Treatment:

- ♦ “Buddhists believe that conception occurs when consciousness enters a fertilized egg. This is considered the beginning of life” and abortion is regarded as killing after that point. “Birth control that prevents conception is acceptable.”⁹
- ♦ End of life decisions are often guided by two important goals: having an alert mind and not being in excessive pain. Some pain control medication may be acceptable if it does not dull consciousness.
- ♦ Allowing a person to die naturally is given high priority.

- ♦ Because of the emphasis on peace and quiet, modern ICU's are particularly ill-suited for Buddhist patients. With the harsh lights and constant noise, it is nearly impossible for them to maintain the contemplative attitude they believe is necessary to get well.
- ♦ Western medicine is often avoided because many believe it will weaken the body. Even some traditional Eastern medicines and treatments are shunned because they use animal products.

Hindus

Overview of Beliefs

Hinduism is among the oldest religions. Its followers are mostly from India. There are approximately three hundred million gods in Hinduism.

However, these gods may be said to symbolize various aspects of the three supreme gods (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishu). The Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita are among the most common examples of Hindu sacred literature. The ultimate goal for each Hindu is to become one with the Supreme Being leading to a state of peace and serenity. The basic approaches to finding God are yoga, meditation, and devotion.

Overview of Health and Illness

It is common among Hindus to ascribe sickness, illness, or injury to karma. The law of karma states that one reaps what one sows. Each individual creates his or her own destiny through thoughts, words, and actions. Therefore, illness may be viewed as the result of one's karma, the residue of one's past deeds (which may be in this life or in past lives).

Birth

Within the traditional Hindu context, the preference for a son may place pressure on women to continue to give birth with the hope of having a son.

Death and Grief

Most Hindus prefer to die at home; however, when this is not possible, certain rituals are performed at the hospital. These may include helping the patient face east and lighting a lamp near the patient's head. Often family and friends will be present, singing hymns or chanting mantras from sacred scriptures.

After the patient dies, holy ash or sandalwood paste is applied on the forehead. Sometimes, members of the family may want the body to face south, which symbolizes facing the god of death. A few drops of holy water are trickled into the mouth. During this period, the incense near the head of the deceased remains burning. The family of the deceased normally prefers the death certificate to be signed as soon as possible so they can take

the body home. Many prefer that the body should not be embalmed nor should any organ be removed, although these practices are not strictly kept in America. Among certain groups, religious pictures are turned toward the wall and mirrors are covered.

In Hindu tradition, cremation is preferred since it is believed that the soul lingers on while the physical body remains. However, cremation is not performed on children under the age of five. Hindus believe that the body will go through the cycle of reincarnation until it is fully united with the Supreme Being.

Diet

Because of the Hindu belief in karma and their respect for all life, it is common for Hindus to practice vegetarianism. However, Hindus are free to choose their own diet. Those who are not vegetarian abstain from eating pork and beef.

Using the left hand for food is often considered inappropriate.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ It is common for the community to be supportive of patients. Therefore many visitors are to be expected as a cultural norm.

Although this may pose some inconveniences for health care, it is helpful to realize how this cultural practice can be significant to the health and wellness of the patient.

- ♦ Special care should be given to Hindu women who may prefer female physicians and nurses. Women often look to their husbands for advice on medical issues.

Medical Treatment

- ♦ In Hinduism, mercy killing, assisted suicide, and suicide are against traditional religious values.
- ♦ The preferred method of handling terminal illness is to allow nature to take its own course. When it comes to artificially prolonging life, there is no prohibition, and it is left to the individual to make the decision.
- ♦ Because of their belief in the law of karma, Hindus do not believe in abortion, even in the case of rape or disability. (Depending on the person, this may not be true in Western culture.) Every life is sacred and has to fulfill its destiny.

Jews

Overview of Beliefs

Judaism teaches that the world was created by a single, all-knowing God and that God designed it to have meaning and purpose. God also desires to enter into relationship with people. The Torah regulates how people should live their lives and is a gift from God so they might live according to God's will. Judaism focuses more on actions than beliefs, although there are thirteen medieval principles that refer to the nature of God, the importance of the Torah (scriptures), the value of prayer, the belief that the Messiah will come and that the dead will be resurrected.

Overview of Health and Illness

Human life is valued above all else in Jewish philosophy and practice. "The expertise of the health care professional is extremely important in caring for a person who is ill. They are seen as instruments of God, who is the ultimate giver and taker of life."¹⁰

Illness and suffering are seen as a natural part of life, not as punishment from God. Because of that, relieving pain and suffering is very important.

Birth

Jews believe that human life begins at birth, which is a celebrated event. Male circumcision is performed eight days after birth by a mohel, a specially trained Jew. The rabbi makes arrangements for a naming ceremony.

Orthodox women require special attention after childbirth.

Death and Grief

In the Jewish community, it is believed that one should not die alone. As a result, when someone is gravely ill, family and friends will spend as much time with them as possible, thus fulfilling one of the greatest directives of Jewish practice. The sick are encouraged to take care of any guilt, anxiety, and fear that they feel. In addition, they may recite the Shema (creed of faith) and a confession. If they are unable to speak, these can be read for them.

There are many details that must be carried out after a death, so a rabbi should be called immediately. Burial should take place as soon as possible following death.

Cremation is discouraged, but allowed. Autopsies are permitted only if necessary to benefit another person, but all body parts must be buried.

A seven-day period of mourning, called Shiva, is observed after the death. This has two purposes: to honor the life of the person who died and to comfort those who remain.

Diet

Observance of Kashrut (keeping kosher) vary among individuals, but ought to be carefully considered. While some people will avoid pork and shellfish, others will abstain from a wide variety of foods. Some Jews will eat food only if it has been certified as kosher and cooked in a kosher kitchen. Primary among dietary laws is the separation of meat and milk products.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ The holiness of life is valued above all else. Therefore, an abortion may be performed if the life of the mother is in danger. In some situations, the mental well-being of the mother is taken into consideration. A rabbi may be consulted.
- ♦ Organ donation is permissible.
- ♦ It is highly offensive to a Jew for someone to encourage them to profess a belief in Jesus or pray to Jesus.
- ♦ Sabbath is observed from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Some patients may refuse treatment on the Sabbath.
- ♦ Some may put on a prayer tallit (shawl) and yarmulke / kippah (cap) while praying.
- ♦ The Jewish prayer book, (Sidur) is helpful for personal devotional practices.
- ♦ Orthodox women are very sensitive to needs of modesty and may prefer a female doctor.
- ♦ One of the most important commandments is to attend the sick. Thus, visiting regulations may need to be loosened to allow for this.

- ♦ On the Sabbath, an Orthodox Jew will not write, touch money, or use electrical appliances such as elevators, bed controls, or lights. A non-Jew may operate these things for the patient.
- ♦ Discharge planning should take into consideration that Orthodox Jews may not travel on the Sabbath.
- ♦ Euthanasia, suicide, and assisted suicide are strictly forbidden by Jewish law, although some forms of passive euthanasia are allowed.
- ♦ Pork-based insulin should be avoided, if possible. However, due to the value placed on human life, it is acceptable to use it if no other alternatives are available.

Medical Treatments

- ♦ Beliefs about life support vary among the branches of Judaism. In certain situations, termination of life support may be allowed, but the patient's rabbi should be consulted. Health care decisions are based on the principles of the value of life and preserving dignity.
- ♦ Birth control is considered a private matter, although condoms are strongly encouraged.
- ♦ Blood transfusions are acceptable, as are organ transplants, since life will be extended.

Muslims

Overview of Beliefs

Over one billion people of the world, or twenty percent of the world's population, practice Islam. Of this number, only ten percent are of Middle Eastern heritage.

The name Islam is from a root word meaning peace and submission, and Islam teaches that one can only find peace by submitting in heart, soul, and deed to the Almighty God. Allah (God) has many attributes, but the most prominent is His description as the All-Merciful. Islamic teachings are based upon faith and duty. Persons who believe in Islam are referred to as Muslims.

The basis for doctrine is found in two main sources: the Quran, which is believed to have been revealed from God to the Prophet Muhammad; and the Sunnah, the traditions and practices of the Prophet throughout his life. Muslims believe in Jesus' virgin birth, the holiness of his mother, Mary, and his miracles. However, they believe Jesus was a prophet like all other prophets, not the Son of God.

The Five Pillars of Islam are: 1) the belief in one God, Allah, and Muhammad as His messenger; 2) prayer must be done five times a day facing toward Mecca; 3) daytime fasting must be observed during the holy month of Ramadan to develop self-control, devotion to God, and care for the poor; 4) annually giving 2.5% of one's capital to the needy, which is called zakat; 5) each Muslim must perform Hajj, pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once during their lifetime, if physically and financially able.

Overview of Health and Illness

Muslims believe that their bodies are given to them as a trust by God to use appropriately for the attainment of salvation. The consumption of alcohol or any intoxicant is forbidden. Smoking or using any other substance that is harmful to the body is also highly discouraged.

Illness is often regarded in Islam as a trial sent by God with the outcome being dependent on

individual attitude. Muslims believe that for every illness (except aging and death) there is a cure, though it may not be known medically. Praying for healing and seeking medical care go hand in hand. Health care workers are considered God's agents of healing, whereas final healing comes from God alone.

Psychiatric problems can be a challenge as family members often do not wish to accept such diagnoses. Suicide is forbidden in Islam; therefore, severe depression with suicide attempts will require major family counseling.

Birth

After worshipping God, taking care of one's parents is the second most important duty of a Muslim. This is emphasized more for the mother because of her pain during pregnancy and childbirth as well as her nursing of the newborn up to the age of two years, if possible. In the Muslim faith, the family unit is the key component from which everything stems. Because the Muslim world is home to a variety of cultures, each will have its own traditions surrounding birth, which may differ substantially, especially for recent immigrant families unfamiliar

with the American health care system.

The father is not typically expected to be in the delivery room, but female family members are usually present and available. However, more Muslim fathers, especially those with Western backgrounds, are now present during delivery and very much involved in their wives' care.

Male circumcision is expected, often while still in the hospital.

Death and Grief

In Islam, death is accepted as the natural cycle of life which can occur at any time. This does not detract from the grief felt for the dying individual, but helps in accepting that this is God's will. It may be difficult for certain Muslim families to discuss limitation of support or withdrawal of care. Frank, repeated discussions with all family members may be necessary to discuss patient prognosis and medical condition. The most accepted Muslim belief is to perform all medical care if the possibility of cure exists, but that prolonging of medical futility and suffering is not warranted.

Once death occurs, Islam emphasizes appropriate grieving with submission to God's will. Quick burial is mandatory and autopsies are generally declined unless absolutely necessary. There is much stress on respect for the body in the Islamic faith, including ritualistic washing prior to burial. Support for the grieving family is important and follow-up contact is helpful. Organ donation is acceptable and may offer comfort.

Diet

Muslims are forbidden to eat pork, foods prepared with alcohol, or to drink alcohol. Animal meat should be slaughtered by a Muslim, Jew, or Christian with active expulsion of blood.

Do's and Don'ts

- While in the hospital, many Muslims may still wish to perform their five daily prayers. Assistance may be needed to wash prior to prayer, especially if the patient is bedridden. Arrangements at the bedside for carrying out the prayers, including a clean sheet on the floor and knowledge of the direction of Mecca (northeast in our institution), will be appreciated.

- Privacy is very important, especially with mixed gender health care professionals present. It is preferred that patients be cared for by persons of the same gender. This is especially true for women.
- Whenever health care workers of the opposite gender enter the patient's room, warning should be given so that the individual may arrange their attire appropriately, especially for Muslim women who cover their hair.

Medical Treatment

- Ask if any traditional medicines or therapies are being used, as they are often used in conjunction with Western medicine.
- Muslims do not believe in abortion unless the mother's life is in jeopardy or the fetus suffers a condition incompatible with life.
- Euthanasia is considered murder.
- Blood transfusions are acceptable.

Sikhs

Overview of Beliefs

The Sikh faith was founded in the 1400's by Guru Nanak Dev of India. It has now grown to be the fifth largest religion in the world with more than twenty-two million believers. Sikhs believe in one creator God. Key components of Sikhism are meditation, earning one's living in an honest and honorable way, sharing with those who are needy, and serving others.

Sikh means one who learns, or a disciple, and the most important goal is to seek truth. The human soul is believed to be inherently good, although it is marred by mistakes and faults. It is believed that a person can become closer to truth and God through reincarnation.

The sacred scriptures are called Guru Granth Sahib. This book was written in 1604 and is at the core of Sikh worship.

Sikhs always wear five articles of faith: 1) uncut hair, which represents spirituality, 2) a wooden comb to symbolize cleanliness, 3) a steel bracelet which represents self-restraint and connection to God, 4) a small sword which symbolizes

courage and dedication to justice and truth, and 5) a special type of underwear that represents purity.¹¹

Overview of Health and Illness

Because of its origin in India, many Sikhs combine Western medicine with herbs and other alternative therapies. Cigarettes, illicit drugs, and alcohol are avoided because they are detrimental to pursuing God's way of life.

Sikhs believe that God's will is always carried out, whether the results come through prayer or traditional medicine. Some will accept the will of God instead of following recommended medical treatment plans.

Birth

Life is considered to be sacred from the moment of conception to death. Birth is therefore a joyful time. Women feel most comfortable with a female physician. Circumcision is not practiced.

Birth control is allowed, although some choose not to use it since it is viewed as disrupting the natural

cycle of life. Sexual relations are only appropriate within the context of marriage.

Death and Grief

At the time of death, scripture and prayer are appropriate. Death is not viewed as a loss, but an opportunity to join with God more fully. Many wish to have sacred hymns recited.

Following death, it is important for the five articles (listed above) to remain with the body. If possible, allow the family to prepare the body according to Sikh traditions. Cremation is done as soon after death as possible.

Diet

Some meats are avoided when the method of killing is believed to be cruel. For this reason, Sikhs will not eat Halal meat (prepared the Islamic way). They do not practice fasting or have other dietary restrictions.

Do's and Don'ts

- ♦ Do not remove a turban (male) or scarf (female) without explaining why it needs to be removed, then allow the patient to take it off in a private place.
- ♦ Do not place the headdress in the same place as shoes.

- ♦ Consult the patient (both male and female) before cutting any hair or shaving any part of the body.
- ♦ Treatment by a health care giver of the same sex is preferable.
- ♦ Cleanliness is highly valued. Daily bathing and hygiene should always be provided unless medically contraindicated.
- ♦ If possible, avoid interrupting prayers and meditation.

Medical Treatment

- ♦ A Sikh may refuse treatment that necessitates body hair removal.
- ♦ Sexual issues are considered to be extremely private and might not be discussed with health care providers. This may make getting a complete medical history difficult when private issues are involved.
- ♦ Assisted suicide and euthanasia are not encouraged.
- ♦ Autopsies and blood transfusions are allowed.
- ♦ Abortion is not allowed except in the case of medical necessity.
- ♦ Prolonging the life of a patient in a vegetative state is discouraged.

Footnotes

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- ² www.ethnicityonline.net
- ³ Basil of Caesarea. "The Long Rules," in *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works*, trans. Sr. M. Monica Wagner, C.S.A. *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 9. New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950.
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