A guide to faith and culture

Treating patients and staff with dignity, value and respect

This information has been put together to help staff understand the needs of patients and their families in relation to faith and culture. Listed below are some important points to consider:

- All patients and visitors are to be treated with privacy, dignity and respect.
- Please always remember that many patients and their visitors will be feeling vulnerable and anxious when in the hospital.
- When ill and around the times of birth and death, religious practices and family customs often become more important than usual, even to non-practising patients.
- Always check which name the patient would like to be called and registered under.
- Some jewellery is of spiritual significance, please check with patient before removing.
- Free flowing water is of great importance to many faith communities and for personal hygiene.
- Patients from some faith and cultural groups will wish to wash their hands and mouth before meals.
- Many women will prefer to be examined by a female doctor, if this is not possible, a female member of staff should be present.
- Some communities will express their emotions freely.
- In several cultural traditions, it is a mark of respect for larger family groups to visit the patient in hospital.
- Please consider the patient’s individual wishes; the guidance here should help you ask more questions from the patient, relatives and carers.

For further advice, please contact:
- Chaplaincy Services 020 8725 3285, or telephone 020 8672 1255 and ask for bleep 6210 or pager SG 144.
- The Equality and Diversity Facilitator: Wilfred.carneiro@stgeorges.nhs.uk or 020 8725 4175.

We would like to hear from you if you have further information about any of the faiths included in this guide, or faiths that you feel need to be added.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Wandsworth Multi-Faith Network and the Chaplaincy Service at St George’s in developing this guide.
The Bahá’í Faith

Bahá’ís have religious and cultural links to many countries around the world. **Prayer Requirements:** Bahá’ís have a choice of three obligatory prayers which are said at least once a day in a quite place in a South Easterly direction. **Relevant languages:** English **Diet, clothing and medicine:** Alcohol is forbidden, except if prescribed as a medicine **Fasting:** 2nd to 20th March, from sunrise to sunset. Not obligatory during sickness, pregnancy, menstruation, breastfeeding mothers, people under 15 or over 75. **Care of the dying:** Belief in an afterlife, but not in re-incarnation. **Death:** The body should not be embalmed or cremated. **Contact:** National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United Kingdom, 27 Rutland Gate, London SW7 1PD. Tel: 020 7584 2566 Website: [www.bahai.org.uk](http://www.bahai.org.uk)

Buddhism

Buddhists may have religious and cultural links to Thailand, China, Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Cambodia and many other countries. **Relevant languages:** English, East Asian and South East Asian languages. **Religious Requirements:** Buddhists do not worship but their practice includes meditation and the reading of scripture, for which they need a quiet environment. **Diet, clothing and medicine:** These vary, always enquire. **Fasting:** Some Buddhists fast, but practice varies. **Care of the dying:** Buddhists like to be informed about their health status to prepare spiritually. A side room with privacy is preferred. **Contact:** International Buddhist Centre, 311 Kingbury High Road, London NW9 9PE. Tel: 020 8204 3301 or locally Dorjechang Buddhist Centre, 62 Graham Road, Wimbledon, SW19 3SS Tel: 020 8540 0049 and Buddhapadipa Temple, 14 Calonne Rd, SW19 5HJ 020 8879 7542.

Christianity

**Origins** in the Middle East. There are many different traditions within Christianity Christians may have religious and cultural links to the Caribbean, many areas of Africa and Asia, Latin
America, North America and Europe, including Ireland and Eastern European countries. The main groups in Wandsworth are Church of England (Anglican), Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and independent churches.

**Relevant languages**: Various

**Prayer requirements**: Always offer the services of the in-house Chaplain who will be able to offer Holy Communion or other forms of prayer and worship.

**Diet, clothing and medicine**: Always check with individual. Some Roman Catholics prefer to eat fish on Fridays.

**Fasting**: Fasting is not usually a part of Christian practice.

**Care of the dying**: Always offer the services of the in-house Chaplain.

**Death**: Customs vary widely. Always ask the family.

**Contact**: Chaplaincy Services at SGH Ext. 3285, Bleep 6210; Pager SG 144.

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**Hinduism**

**Origins** in India. Hindus may have religious and cultural links to the Indian subcontinent, East Africa and other countries.

**Relevant languages**: English, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Punjabi, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya.

**Prayer Requirements**: Hindus prefer to wash before prayer.

**Diet, clothing and medicine**: Most Hindus do not eat meat (particularly beef and pork) and vegetarians sometimes avoid eggs, onion, garlic and non-vegetarian cheese. Avoid serving food to vegetarians with utensils or dishes that have been in contact with meat products. Always check with patient / carer. Many female patients prefer a female doctor.

**Fasting**: There are several days and times when some Hindus fast. Pure foods such as fruit and yoghurt may be consumed.

**Birth**: Recording the exact time of birth can be important for astrological reasons. Mothers may prefer complete rest after birth and like to have the baby in the same room.

**Care of the dying**: Relatives may wish to perform rituals at this time.

**Death**: jewellery, sacred threads or other religious objects should not be removed from the body. Washing the body is part of the funeral rites and should be carried out by the relatives.

**Contact**: The Hindu Society, 664 Garratt Lane, London SW17 0NP Telephone 020 8605 2590.
Islam

Origins: in the Middle East. There are several traditions within Islam, including Sunni and Shi’a. Muslims may have religious and cultural links to Pakistan, India, parts of Africa, South East Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean and other countries.

Relevant languages: English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Arabic, South East Asian languages.

Prayer Requirements: Muslims may want to pray five times each day, according to custom. They prefer to wash beforehand and to have a clean space in which to pray, facing the south-east. Special religious days are observed by Muslims.

Diet, clothing and medicine: Meat that has been slaughtered according to Muslim custom is termed “halal”. Most Muslims will not eat non-halal meat. Water is required in toilets and if bedpans are used. Showering in fresh water is preferred to bathing in still water. Modesty for women is of great significance. Muslim women from some cultures cover themselves fully, including the face, when men are present. Physical contact or shaking hands between the sexes is discouraged and should not be mis-interpreted.

Fasting: During the month of Ramadan (the dates change each year) no food or drink is taken 1.5 hours before sunrise until sunset. Please explain to patients during this period if food and drink is required for recovery.

Birth: Circumcision is often performed on male babies within four weeks of birth. (Wandsworth PCT provides a service: 020 8677 0083).

Care of the dying: Patients may want to die facing Mecca (towards the south east) and be with relatives.

Death: Many Muslims follow strict rules in respect of the body after death. Please seek guidance.

Contact: The London Central Mosque and Cultural Centre (Sunni), 146 Park Road, London NW8 7RG Tel: 020 7724 3363.

Local contact: Secretary of Balham Mosque (Sunni): Farouk Vali telephone 020 8673 5694 Director of Burials Rafik Sulayman mobile number: 07754 901110

Judaism

Origins: in the Middle East. There are several main traditions, including Liberal, Orthodox, Reform and Progressive Judaism. Orthodox Jews often observe strict dietary, clothing and other customs. Liberal Jews may not place such an emphasis on these, but place great value on being able to say traditional prayers at appropriate times.

Relevant languages: English
Prayer requirements: The Jewish Shabbat (Sabbath) begins shortly before dusk each Friday and lasts until sunset on Saturday. Passover, in March or April, and Yom Kippur, in September or October, are traditionally times of particular religious observance.

Diet, clothing and medicine: Some Jews eat only Kosher food (food that has been prepared in a particular way). Some Orthodox Jewish women cover their hair. Some Orthodox Jewish women would consider it immodest to have physical contact with male health professionals.

Fasting: The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), a 25 hour day in late September / October which many Jews mark by fasting and prayer. Fasting will not normally be undertaken against medical advice.

Care of the dying: Family members will normally want to be present and prayers said. A rabbi is not essential for this. If a rabbi is requested, the patient’s own rabbi should be contacted first.

Contact: Local contacts: South London Liberal Synagogue, PO Box PO Box 14475, Streatham London SW16 1ZW 020-8769 4787. South London Synagogue (Orthodox) 45 Leigham Court Road, London SW16 2NF 020-8677 0234

Sikhism

Origins: in Punjab, India. Sikhs may have religious and cultural links to India, South East Asia, East Africa and other countries.

Relevant languages: English, Punjabi

Prayer requirements: 3 times a day.

Diet, clothing and medicine: Many Sikhs are strict vegetarians; others will eat meat but not beef and not ‘halal’ meat. For many Sikhs it is important not to cut their hair or shave, although this may be allowed as part of surgical treatment. Sikh men often wear a turban and beard, while Sikh women cover their hair with a dupatta. Sikhs may also carry a comb, wear a steel bangle, undergarments of a certain design and a short sword, which are sacred items and which should not be removed without permission.

Showering in fresh water is preferred to bathing in still water.

Fasting: Fasting is not part of Sikh practice.

Birth: Some Sikh women will have strict rituals in respect of clothing during birth.

Care of the dying: Family members may read prayers and sit with the patient.

Death: The deceased may be washed, making sure to handle the five sacred items with care and respect.

Contact: Khalsa Centre, 95 Upper Tooting Road, SW17 7TW. Tel 020 8767 3196.