

Faith and End-of-Life Care

From a report for Leicester City CCG by Irfhana Mururajani, 2014 – to be reviewed 2023.

1 Baha'i Faith

Principles

- A new religion in comparison to the traditional faiths – less than 200 years old and of Persian origin.
- Equality of men and women
- Harmony between science and religion
- Eliminating extreme wealth and poverty
- Establishing a universal auxiliary language
- Nine pointed star – a common symbol of the religion

Beliefs

- Knowledge has been revealed by God through messengers, teachers and prophets
- Heaven and Hell are defined as proximity to God, and not as 'physical' places
- Their leader, Baha'u'llah is a manifestation of God
- Believe in life after death – eternal progress of the soul towards God
- Believe in one God, unity of humanity and the harmony of all faiths
- No formal clergy within the faith

End of Life Care Considerations

The use of drugs and alcohol are strictly prohibited unless prescribed by a doctor or clinician. It is preferable for Baha'is to receive treatments that do not involve prescription drugs or alcohol - it is important for followers of the faith to maintain their rationality and dignity. Baha'is will also generally follow a diet that supports good mental and physical wellbeing.

Each individual is responsible for their own spiritual development by reading the scriptures and through services within the local Baha'i community and by an elected council known as the 'Local Spiritual Assembly'. The council may appoint someone from the community to be a 'caregiver' to visit and comfort a dying person. This caregiver will usually provide love and comfort rather than spiritual advice or guidance. The patient may be comforted by thoughts of their next life and how to accept this transition.

Death

Baha'is believe that the soul leaves the body at the time of death, and that the body must be treated with utmost respect and dignity as it is seen as the soul's carrier.

After death, the body must be gently washed and prepared before being wrapped in a shroud and the rituals being carried out.

The deceased will usually be buried as close to the place of death – this is usually no more than an hour's drive away from this place. Burials are recommended to take place as soon as possible without any unnecessary delay. Cremation and embalming are not permitted within the faith

2 Buddhism

Principles

- Buddha – 'the enlightened one', a title given to Siddhartha Gautama (560 – 483 BC) the founder of Buddhism
- A practical philosophy rather than a religion – seen as a path to take or way of life
- To develop the mind to its fullest potential of compassion and wisdom
- The path leads to liberation from the endless suffering of existence
- The wheel of 'Dhamma' is a long recognised symbol of Buddhism – represents the cycle of life, death and rebirth. The eight spokes of the wheel symbolise the core teachings of Buddha

Belief

- Belief in an 'ultimate reality' – do not believe in God
- Buddha is seen as the 'teacher of Gods'
- To live peacefully by following the Buddha's example of moral guidance
- Belief in Karma – that deliberate actions bring the appropriate reward, good or bad.
- 'Samsara' – the endless cycle of life, death and rebirth. Buddhists will attempt to emancipate themselves from this and reach nirvana.
- 'Nirvana' is true enlightenment and the end of the Buddhist path. It is to achieve a blissful state beyond all normal human experience which ends all suffering.

End of Life Care

Buddhism imposes very few special requirements on patients or clinicians, and caring for Buddhist patients should not pose any specific challenges. The faith does emphasise the extra special significance given to mothers and therefore must be treated with special kindness and love.

Buddhists are usually psychologically well prepared for death and react with calmness and dignity. Death has major significance for the deceased and the living. For the deceased it signifies the moment of transition to the next phase – rebirth, and for the living it is a reminder of Buddha's teachings around the temporary nature of each life.

At the time of death, it is extremely important to provide as much peace and quiet for the dying person as possible. Death is regarded as the disintegration of the physical and mental aggregates before the two elements recombine for the rebirth. It is better for the dying person to keep their mind as calm as possible to ensure a better rebirth. Once death has occurred, Buddhists believe that it is best to keep the body in a very

peaceful state. The body may be taken home for up to 3 days where prayers are said for the person.

Buddhists will try to live as long as possible, but they may not support the unnecessary prolonging of life. Buddhists accept that death is a part of life and that they will experience many deaths towards their path to enlightenment. If a person is suffering, and is in extreme pain then it is believed that it is better to die in a natural and peaceful way.

Buddhists are generally in favour of receiving hospice care, but this would need to be discussed carefully and taking into account their cultural background. When caring for a Buddhist patient it is vital to adopt a positive and caring attitude and to maintain a calm and peaceful atmosphere.

3 Christianity

Principles

- To follow and dedicate themselves to the life and work of Jesus Christ
- One of three Abrahamic faiths along with Judaism and Islam
- Has developed over 2000 years from the personal example and teachings of Jesus
- The cross is a universal symbol to remind Christians of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection.
- Four main groupings within the faith:
 - Orthodox
 - Protestant (including Anglican)
 - Catholic
 - Pentecostal

Beliefs

- The Trinity is almost central to all Christian belief – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Jesus seen as the incarnation of God
- Belief in life after death – being resurrected and held to account in God's court on Judgement day
- Dwelling in the hereafter is dependent on God's Grace
- Salvation is a gift from God

End of Life Care

Most Christians would prefer to be at home with family and loved ones as death approaches and a lot of effort is made by hospice staff to facilitate this wish. Attention should also be given to ensuring relatives and friends can be with the patient either at home or in the hospital.

Roman Catholic Christians may invite a priest or request for the chaplain to visit to pray with the person or to administer certain rites. The priest may even be someone who is close to or familiar with the family.

It is not unusual for the priest to talk directly to the patient to ask for a confession as the last moments approach, especially if the patient remains alert and can communicate. This is viewed as a ritual which can help the dying person cleanse their soul and have a greater chance of forgiveness if the priest assists with this process.

An Anglican may be visited by a minister or priest to help prepare the person for death by undertaking Holy Communion or applying oil to the patient.

As the final moments approach, family and friends will value the farewell process. A lot of love and support is shown to the patient and the time is often used for forgiving each other and fostering reconciliation. This is particularly helpful for the patient to reduce the mental anguish associated with having unresolved matters on their mind.

Related Factors

Some important related factors were brought up during the research for this report. A meeting was held with two priests and chaplains from two separate branches within the faith to discuss and understand these factors' contribution to effective end of life care. The following points were recorded:

- As far as NHS chaplains are concerned, the system assumes that they are there in a prescriptive capacity
- 'Holy hovering' – priests will often walk around the wards and observe the activities in order to 'pick up' on any spiritual or emotional needs
- Chaplains can be used to have difficult conversations – they are very good at creating and opening up a sensitive dialogue
- 'Everybody has spiritual needs' – whilst not all people or family members may practice or share the beliefs of the deceased, it is hugely important to perform some sort of ritual. For example, lighting a candle seems like the 'right thing to do' and helps people achieve a sense of closure or doing something relevant during the time.
- A measured approach may be required – individuals and families need help in understanding what is appropriate for the dying person.

4 Hinduism

Principles

- As referred to by Hindus as 'Sanatan Dharma' – the Eternal Way to God
- Embraces many beliefs and practices on broadly agreed principles around the nature and purpose of existence.
- It is not a religion of many Gods, but based on the belief of one God, a cosmic energy known as Brahman
- Most commonly used symbol is that of 'Om' – represents unity with the essence of existence

Beliefs

- Brahman is the source of everything and the reality behind the diversity of life to which everything must eventually return

- Expression of Brahman is through a multitude of ways – some of which interpreted as ‘gods and goddesses’ with their own special functions.
- The soul must break free from the illusion of reality to achieve a reunion with Brahman.
- Everyone is responsible for their own actions and behaviours
- Believe in ‘samsara’ – the cycle of life, death and rebirth and the cause and effect of karma, which is similar to Buddhism.

End of Life Care

Hindus believe in the concept of reincarnation in that the soul of a human being will endure multiple lifetimes as it strives towards living life in a perfected way. Once this has been achieved, then the soul will be reunited with God.

Karma is central to this belief and Hindus believe that intentions and actions are rewarded in line with their intentions – good or bad. A person who is suffering will be a result of their bad deeds or intentions.

The older generation of Hindus in Leicester believe very strongly that every person must endure pain and suffering as they approach death as part of the karmic process. This belief can lead to a potentially difficult situation as whilst pain relief is acceptable, the elder Hindu patient may insist on not cutting short the pain or suffering in an attempt to repay their bad deeds.

The second generation of Hindus in Leicester tend to be more flexible around religious or cultural requirements as they are more in tune with western values, but still revere their Hindu heritage. For example, they may be more receptive to administering pain relief for a relative if they feel it will ease pain or suffering.

Devout Hindus may have specific dietary requirements, as many are strict vegetarians. In addition, some may only agree to eat food that has been prepared and handled by someone from the same caste or sect as them, as this symbolises the sense of being pure and clean. This includes receiving drinking water and tea or coffee, but there is no sin attached to eating or drinking anything given to them by a non-Hindu.

Chanting is an important practice in Hinduism, especially during the final stages of life. Hindus will usually chant the name of Lord Ram during sad times as opposed to Lord Krishna during happy moments.

As death approaches for a Hindu, it is preferable if possible to have a ‘home death’. The home of the person is seen as the last resting place of death, and the deceased must depart from their home to take their final journey, regardless of where death occurred.

5 Humanism

Principles

- Humanists view life as only one life
- No recognition of God or scriptures as being authoritative over humans

- To do good in life and live in a way that is morally acceptable
- Humanist – emphasis on positivity and that humanity is common amongst everyone
- To treat everyone with respect and recognise individual freedom

Beliefs

- Morality is based on an analysis of the consequences of our words and actions
- Considers reasoning, intellect and the shared human experience
- Each person's welfare, choice, happiness and fulfilment are vital in defining the purpose of life
- To respect human rights and individual freedom while understanding that there are differences

End of Life Care

As death approaches, the sequences of events seem to be very much an individual choice or preference. Comfort, love and support is shown to the patient and religious views should not be imposed on the humanist. There are no set rites or rituals and the person can state what they would like to happen. This will help the healthcare providers to understand if life should be prolonged or what type of pain relief can be administered if necessary.

The traditional perspective has been that those people who have no faith do not need to consider the services of a chaplain or priest, but over time there seems to be an acknowledgement that a need does exist in whatever capacity and must be respected.

Volunteer humanist chaplains or non-pastoral visitors can be requested to visit the patient if the patient asks for this or is happy to receive a visit. This can help the patient talk through any concerns, anxieties or fears in the lead up to death.

Due to their belief that life ends after death, humanists do not believe in the concepts of a separate soul or a transition into an afterlife. They do believe that the deceased lives on through the memories of those that knew them.

6 Islam

Principles

- A Muslim submits to the will of Allah (God) as revealed in the Qur'an and through the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)
- To live according to the example of the prophet Muhammad and his teachings
- Belief that Muhammad is the final messenger of God – following those who preceded him, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus
- Islam is the third of the Abrahamic faiths and fulfils the revelations of those that preceded it – Christianity and Judaism

Beliefs

- Believe and worship one God – neither male nor female, has no partners, associates or children and is omnipresent and all knowing
- Each person has a personal and direct relationship with God – A person should ask from God what they want directly rather than have someone else do it on their behalf
- To believe in the Day of Judgement – where all souls will be resurrected and held to account for their behaviour on earth
- To have a fundamental belief in the afterlife – once held to account the soul will journey to either Heaven or Hell for eternity
- To live in a moral and good way as outlined in the Qur'an and the instructions given by the Prophet Muhammad
- To treat all of God's creation with love, kindness, compassion and justice – lead by example.
- To fulfil their religious duties and their obligation to God by worshipping in a structured and timely way

End of Life Care

As with all faiths, the level of spirituality with a Muslim will vary depending on the individual. However, regardless of how they lived, most if not all Muslims will become more spiritually heightened and try to align themselves with their religious beliefs during the last stages of their life.

As end of life approaches, the patient will usually be encouraged to say out loud the declaration of faith- '*There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his final Messenger*'. It is extremely important for a Muslim to try and ensure that these are the final words said with their last breath. This is seen as confirming their faith in God and to die peacefully. If the patient is unconscious during this time, then it is usually a close family member that will recite it on their behalf.

The patient will also repent for their sins and reconcile relationships and other unresolved areas of their life. Repentance and asking for forgiveness from God is an individual act and there are no intermediaries who can intercede on anyone's behalf.

During the last stages, it is normal for family, relatives and friends to visit the dying person as this is seen as a virtuous and obligatory act and to remind those visiting that they will be in a similar position one day. Verses from the Qur'an are recited along with quiet meditation and remembrance of God.

Muslims will always try to preserve and prolong life wherever possible, as life is viewed as a 'trust' from God and must be protected with a great sense of responsibility. Pain relief and other medical means of sustaining life are quite acceptable. There may sometimes be an emotional conflict within the family members to keep someone alive, even if the patient is enduring pain and suffering. In such instances a Muslim legal scholar – a Mufti may be called upon to advise if treatment should continue or stop in accordance to Sharia principles. It is quite acceptable to stop treatment if there is no improvement and to save the dying person from unnecessary suffering.

It is important to note that the issue of visiting the sick is very important, especially amongst Muslims who come from South Asia and Africa, who often live as or are part of a large extended family unit. Due to the religious significance attached to visiting sick people, all relatives may have an equal desire to visit someone. For example a first cousin of the patient will want to visit as much as a sibling, and will visit out of a sense of duty or implied expectation. This can prove especially difficult to accommodate within a hospital setting because of the strict visiting protocol and for the welfare of other patients.

It is also important to note that hospices are particularly adept at handling such situations. They can quite easily accommodate 30 to 40 members of a family at one time, and seem to deeply understand the significance of this cultural custom.

Once death has occurred, arrangements for the funeral will begin almost immediately. Muslims believe that it is extremely important to bury the deceased as quickly as possible. This is to save the deceased from any spiritual anguish, and so that the transition into the afterlife can start.

A funeral will usually take place within 24 hours of death, and it is important that paperwork is handled efficiently to ensure a quick release of the body. Having the body released quickly will also serve to minimise the grief of the deceased's family

7 Jainism

Principles

- An ancient religion, it is one of the oldest
- Jains follow the teachings of Jinas (the victors) – a succession of 24 teachers
- They follow their teachings to achieve spiritual liberation
- Symbol of a raised hand – a reminder to stop and consider the actions
- Strong core belief in non-violence, to avoid harm to all living life forms

Beliefs

- No belief in an 'all powerful' God
- Believe in samara – cycle of life, death and rebirth. Similar to Buddhism and Hinduism
- The purpose of life is to free oneself from the endless cycle of samsara
- Belief in the eternal existence of the universe with no beginning or end in time or space
- To live in a strict and disciplined manner in order to be liberated from the current time

End of Life Care

For a practising Jain, the ideal death would be at home. If an individual has been suffering with a long term condition and approaching the final stages of life, the family may request to take the person home.

During the final phases of life, a Jain will seek to detach themselves from any material or physical assets and family and relatives. Their main desire for a Jain

during this time is to seek forgiveness from their loved ones for any wrong or harm caused during their lifetime. Once this has been done, the mind can focus on its inner self, by partaking in chanting or reading from specific spiritual texts.

Although there are no formal priests within Jainism, there are lay preachers and they may be accessed to assist in seeking forgiveness, chanting mantras and to help the patient to feel calm and at peace. The patient's family would usually contact someone but it would be useful to also ask the patient directly if they would like to access this service.

As death approaches, it is customary to light a 'Divo' a special candle type light to help soothe the patient and create a calm and peaceful atmosphere. A blessed powder called 'Vaakshap' made from sandal wood may be used to help the person make a smooth transition into their next life.

Once death has occurred, the body must be treated with dignity and respect, but there are no formal practices associated with the religion. It is customary for the body to be taken home to allow people to pay their respects, and it is from home where all Jains will begin their final journey to being cremated.

As Jain's believe in rebirth, there is usually an underlying tone of celebration rather than sadness as they perceive the soul to go on and live forever. However, there will be a natural sense of loss for the person that has just departed.

8 Jehovah's Witness

Principles

- Founded in the 1870s by Charles Taze Russell
- Jehovah is the one true God and Jesus is the direct creation of God
- Will interpret much of the bible in a literal sense
- To live life in a wholesome way and to avoid all things hated by God

Beliefs

- To be proactive in spreading the word of God
- The family structure is patriarchal and the father has the final say in decision making
- Salvation lies in adhering to all of God's requirements and commands
- To study and act upon the bible daily

End of Life Care

Providing end of life care to a Jehovah's Witness is relatively straight forward. There are however some important aspect to take into consideration, as the faith is very explicit on certain practices. In relation to prolonging life, it is a matter of choice; however, prolonging life by artificial means is usually not supported.

There are clear guidelines around the use and acceptance of blood. Blood transfusions are not permitted or encouraged as this is viewed as going against the

religion. Organ donation can be a matter of choice, but all blood must be drained from the organ before any transplant.

As a patient approaches the end of their life they may wish to hold a book study to discuss spiritual topics. Family and loved ones will often be present to support the ill person. Pain relief is completely acceptable and everything should be done to sustain life as long as there is no unnecessary suffering endured by the patient.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that death is the termination of conscious existence, and those who die before the day of Judgement will be awakened by the call of Jehovah. There is a strong belief that within resurrection lies hope and the righteous will be with Christ. They also believe that death and the dead are nothing to be afraid of and should not be viewed with fear.

9 Judaism

Principles

- One of the three Abrahamic faiths based on monotheism – belief in one God
- Torah is the main religious text and is highly respected along with the Talmud
- Universal belief that God is eternal, all powerful and all knowing. God is the creator of the universe
- Follow the teachings and life of Moses

Beliefs

- Belief in one God and his Prophets, and Moses is the greatest of the Prophets
- Believe in heaven and hell
- Everyone will be rewarded or punished in accordance to their actions and behaviours
- To observe the Sabbath – from dusk on a Friday to dusk on a Saturday
- Obligated to perform prayers daily as part of their spiritual duty

End of Life Care

As with the other traditional Abrahamic faiths, Judaism attaches an infinite value on life. The belief is that as humans are created in the image of God, every hour, day or week in life can have as much value as a year or ten years. When it comes to preserving or prolonging life there is a similar belief held to Christians and Muslims that people should not have to endure unnecessary suffering or pain. Therefore, palliative care plays an important role in Jewish beliefs.

Once a person is approaching the final stages of life, a special set of prayers called 'Viduy' are recited before the individual departs. The Viduy seeks to bring down God's Mercy upon the patient. Viduy is a great reminder for Jewish people that the only important matter is their relationship with God and other human beings, and to not be consumed by materialism and wealth.

The patient should not be touched or left alone in the final moments before death and close family members should be present during this time. Grief must be measured at

all times and Jewish people must not wail or cry in a loud manner, as this causes discomfort for the deceased.

The Jewish faith has the same level of respect for the deceased as Islam and Orthodox Christianity and a Rabbi must be contacted once death has occurred. The body must be laid flat with arms by the side and legs straight with the eyes closed. The burial of the deceased must not be unnecessarily delayed, and efforts should be made to bury the individual on the same day. This signifies the need for the soul to be returned to God.

The need for a quick burial again suggests that processes must be in order to ensure that the body can be released without delay and all paperwork is complete so that the funeral preparations can begin.

10 Rastafarian

Principles

- A movement which began in Jamaica in the 1920s. Seen as an alternative to western colonial influences and practices
- Based on the teachings of Marcus Garvey to promote the interests of people from African descent
- Continues to evolve and bring about the transformation of an unjust society
- Work towards a return to Africa – the true home and heaven on earth
- The belief system is less rigid in comparison to more established, mainstream faiths.

Belief

- The importance for black people to understand western economic and cultural domination
- Recognises the dignity of each individual
- Jah (God) is within everyone and everyone can speak directly to Jah
- Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Ethiopia is an incarnation of Jah
- Significance of Marijuana – a remedy as prescribed by God to cure all physical and spiritual ailments
- Influenced heavily by Christianity

End of Life Care

The cultural lifestyle and mysticism of Rastafarians may prove challenging when trying to implement a traditional system of end of life or palliative care. The view taken by this group is one of suspicion and mistrust in terms of the use of drugs and some synthetic treatments.

The ideology is in tune with nature and the strong belief of the body's natural ability to heal itself. There is a natural scepticism about invasive treatments as they believe it goes against God's plan. The Marijuana herb plant is seen as central in helping to cure physical illness. A lot of trust and conviction is placed upon this plant and it is the first point of call when a medicine is required.

It would be very unusual for a Rastafarian to see a doctor or be admitted to hospital. It would cause some upset and the preference is to be treated at home with loved ones. Healthcare providers must be sensitive to these needs and detailed information about treatment risks, benefits and options should be given to the patient.

There are some cultural aspects of care that must be acknowledged when looking after a Rastafarian patient. For example, a male Rastafarian would object to being intimately or internally examined by a male healthcare professional, and similarly a female patient would want to be examined by another woman.

Rastafarians place a great emphasis on nature and everything being in its natural state. The diet of 'Ital' food is based on everything be cooked naturally with no salt or any artificial enhancements added into the food. A patient would choose to have food brought to them from their home and cooked by someone who understood the philosophy.

The dressing of a Rastafarian is very modest and hair must be in a natural and uncut state. Most men will have long hair known as 'dreadlocks' and a beard which symbolises their pride and strength.

A patient at the end of life stage may want to avoid any unnecessary medication, and procedures such as blood transfusions or amputations may be deemed unacceptable. However, a discussion with the family or community would need to take place before coming to a decision.

During the last stages, the friends and relatives will visit the person as part of their Rastafarian duty. Again this could be challenging to manage within a hospital environment. An elder might come forward to administer any rites, and there may be some ritual chanting and drumming if appropriate.

11 Sikhism

Principles

- A Sikh is a 'student' or 'disciple' who faithfully believes in one immortal God, the ten Gurus and the Holy book – The Guru Granth Sahib.
- Follows the lifestyle and teachings of the ten Gurus
- Strong sense of national and cultural identity
- The 'Khanda' is the most well-known symbol – a double edged sword that represents the power and eternal perfection of God, and the political and spiritual balance.

Beliefs

- There is one God who sees all as equal and everyone can have a direct relationship with God
- Belief in the cycle of life, death and rebirth as dictated by karma
- Shared beliefs with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.
- Believe more in prayer and earning God's grace to neutralise karma
- More tolerant to other faiths and believe in living the 'right' life

End of Life Care

It is common for friends and family to be with their loved one as they approach death. This togetherness is a sign of their love for the individual. Relatives will recite from the Holy Scriptures as it comforting for them and for the ill person as they prepare to depart.

Unlike the other faiths that Sikhism shares common beliefs with, there is no lighting of a lamp or placing the ill person on the floor at the moment of passing. Instead the term 'Waheguru' is chanted to maintain composure and remind them of the inevitability of God's will.

Sikhs will not fear death as it is an integral component of their belief system, and cremation is the preferred mode of body disposal. When looking after a Sikh patient, consideration must be given to dietary requirements as devout Sikhs are purely vegetarian. Special respect must also be given to the hair, as male Sikhs will wear a turban and will require the hair to be maintained in accordance to their faith. It is advisable that someone from the family helps with this aspect of care.