



Caring for Muslim Patients

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Learning Objectives

Recognize common Muslim patient spiritual/religious needs

Avoid common assumptions

Support prayer, privacy, dietary, and end-of-life needs

Communicate in ways that build trust

Know when to consult a Muslim chaplain, imam, or Islamic mortuary

Words to Know

Islam:

Name of the religion

Muslims:

Followers of Islam

Quran:

Scriptural text



Allah:

Arabic word for God

Imam/Shaykh:

Leader, scholar

Mosque/Masjid:

Place of worship

Not a Monolith

- Muslims live across every region of the world
- The largest Muslim populations are not in the Middle East
- U.S. Muslims are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and generationally diverse
- “Muslim” may intersect with race, immigration, language, family culture, sect, class, trauma, and level of practice
- Clinical rule: **ask the patient/family what matters; do not assume**



Muslims and Healthcare


Illustratively, one participant stated, “doctors and nurses . . . everybody . . . looks at you like (a) stranger or like you will be a problem for them.”

Another noted, “I think we all know of stories where due to someone having an accent or . . . appearing Muslim . . . that sometimes the doctors may be more blunt with you, or . . . belittle you, or not . . . give you the time of day.”


Participants stated that Muslim patients run the risk of being treated negatively by providers when requesting accommodations for their religious and cultural beliefs. One participant shared her experience with a male doctor who became upset after she expressed her preference for a female gynecologist. Another participant said her doctor became angry when she requested that he speak to her from behind the curtain as she was disrobed. At times, participants said, providers may not take requests for accommodations seriously, “think(ing) it’s a big joke . . . or a bunch of old-fashioned foolishness they don’t want to be bothered with.”

Participants noted that providers who acknowledge and respect their religious beliefs are more likely to be trusted and their recommendations adhered to. Summing up this theme, a participant shared: When the nurse . . . tells you . . . I respect your religion . . . immediately, I will have trusted her. . . That’s half of the work of being a healthcare giver . . . to get the trust of the patient. When the patient trusts you...he will be compliant with care.

Aasim Padela, “Religious Values and Healthcare Accommodations: Voices from the American Muslim Community,” *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 27, no. 6 (June 2012): 709.



(Shared) Beliefs and
(Varied) Practices



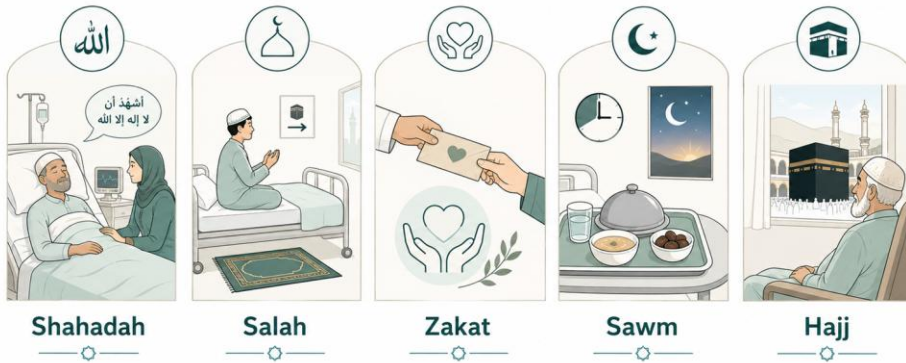
Core Beliefs:

1. One God
2. Angels
3. God's divine message
4. Prophets & Messengers
5. The Day of Judgement
6. Divine Decree




Muslims practice by:

1. Reciting the creed of faith
2. Ritual prayer 5x day
3. Almsgiving
4. Fasting in **Ramadan***
5. **Hajj** pilgrimage*





Practical Accommodations

- 
- Three Common Requests:
- (1) gender-concordant care when possible
 - (2) halal food/dietary awareness
 - (3) a neutral prayer space

Aasim Padela, "Religious Values and Healthcare Accommodations: Voices from the American Muslim Community," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 27, no. 6 (June 2012): 709.



A patient shared that every time they started salah, someone would come into the room loudly and interrupt the prayer. We came up with this idea for a sign the patient could place in front to alert visitors.

Dear Provider,

I am praying.

Please return in 5-10 minutes so that I may focus in a quiet and peaceful environment.

Thank you very much!

Ritual Prayer Accommodations



Neutral prayer space availability for Muslim staff/families

Prayer: Two Meanings



“When My servants ask about me, truly I am near. I answer the call of the caller when one calls Me.” (Qur’an 2:186)

Raised palms, “O, God” or “O, Allah.”

Begin with **gratitude**: “Thank you for bringing us together. Thank you for sustaining us. My brother/sister is in need; relieve their illness...”

Asking for **forgiveness** from God, for a high station in **Paradise**, for **healing**, for **reconciliation**, for **strength**, for **patience**, for **peace**, for **guidance**.

End with “Ameen” or Amen and leave out “In Jesus’s name.”



Islamic Coping and Well-Being

Trials, Hardships, and Meaning-Making

- The Qur'an frames hardship as part of worldly life
- Illness may be understood as a test, purification, reminder, or path toward closeness to Allah
- Sabr (patience) is not passive silence; it is faithful endurance while seeking help
- Muslims may cope through prayer, Qur'an, family, and trust in Allah

Chaplaincy caution: do not impose meaning too early



Tawakul (Trust in God)



Prophet Muhammad stated, “Trusting Allah with due tawakkul is understanding that Allah provides sustenance as He provides for the birds; they go out in the morning with empty stomachs and come back in the evening with full stomachs.”

Beliefs related to death and dying

The Qur'an says, *"They (true believers) say: To God we belong and to Him is our return."*

The Prophet Muhammad said, *"Live in this world as a traveller or a stranger."*



Beliefs related to grief



Prophet Muhammad took his infant son, Ibrahim and kissed him and smelled him. Ibrahim was in his last breaths, and Prophet Muhammad started shedding tears. `Abdur Rahman bin `Auf said, "O Messenger of God, even you are weeping!"

He said, "O Ibn `Auf, this is **mercy**." Then he wept more and said, "The eyes are shedding tears and the heart is grieved, and we will not say except what pleases our Lord, O Ibrahim! Indeed we are grieved by your separation."



End of Life and Bioethics

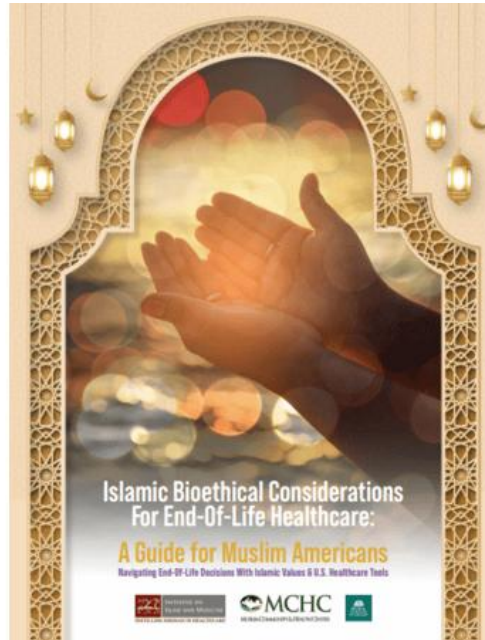
End of Life

- Expect strong family/community presence when possible
- Support Qur'an recitation
- Ask about privacy and who should be present
- After death: minimize unnecessary handling; expedite release when possible
- Muslim burial is generally preferred as soon as possible; cremation and embalming are generally avoided
- Contact Muslim chaplain/imam and Islamic funeral service early



The image shows a YouTube video player interface. At the top, the video title is "Muslim Perspectives on Death and Dying" with a "MINICOURSE" badge in the top right corner. Below the title is a thumbnail image of a woman in a yellow hijab standing in a cemetery. To the right of the thumbnail, the text reads: "With ICJS Muslim Scholar Zeyneb Sayilgazi, Ph.D. THURSDAYS MAY 2, 9, AND 16 7:00-8:30 PM ET ONLINE". The ICJS logo is also present. Below the thumbnail, the video title "Muslim Perspectives on Death and Dying" is repeated in a larger font. Underneath, it says "by Institute for Islamic, Christian, & Jewish Studies". At the bottom of the video player, it displays "Playlist • 3 videos • 64 views" and a "Play all" button with a play icon. There are also icons for bookmarking and sharing.

Hospice and Palliative Care (Free PDF)





Why Muslim Patients May Not Ask for a Chaplain



Chaplaincy

Many Muslims are unaware of pastoral care/chaplains' role, services, and benefits.

Do not assume refusal means no spiritual need. It may mean they do not understand or trust the role.



Say this, not that



Instead of:

“Would you like to see the chaplain?”

Try:

“I’m part of spiritual care. I support patients from all faiths and backgrounds. Would any spiritual, religious, or emotional support be helpful right now?”

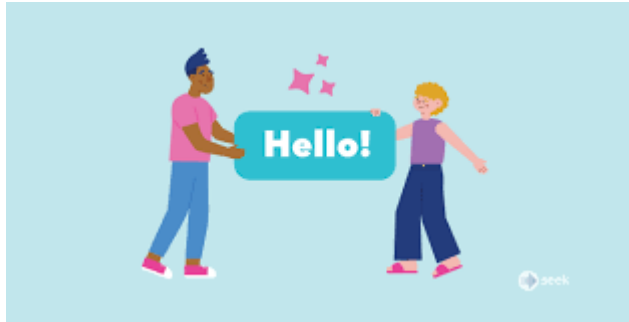
For Muslim patients specifically:

“Would it be helpful to connect you with a Muslim chaplain or imam, or are there any prayer, Qur’an, food, or family needs we can help with?”

Getting into the room

Facilitation

- Brochure introducing chaplaincy
- Card with your name and contact



- Offer tangible resources: card, brochure, prayer room info, Muslim-specific services
- Name available supports: prayer, Qur'an, halal food questions, family support, end-of-life needs, imam/Muslim chaplain referral
- Use permission-based care: ask before praying, touching, calling clergy, or entering sensitive space
- Greet with respect; avoid assuming touch is welcome

Helpful resources

Prayers for Muslim Patients by Imam Tamer Abdelaziz

- **E-book on Amazon.com**

Association of Muslim Chaplains

- **www.associationofmuslimchaplains.org**

Sanad Collective

- **www.sanadcollective.org**

Ch. Sohaib Sultan's blog

- **<https://medium.com/@seekingilham>**

Initiative on Islam and Medicine

- **<https://medicineandislam.org/i-am-pcn/>**



MUSINGS of a MUSLIM CHAPLAIN



Sondos Kholaki

MANTLE OF MERCY

Islamic Chaplaincy
in North America

edited by

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“ Give glad tidings
to the patient ”

Edited by Ali R. Candir