



# CARING FOR MUSLIM PATIENTS NEARING THE END OF LIFE



The purpose of this booklet is to provide an aid to staff, Muslim patients and their families about the personal needs and preferences nearing end of life.

**This booklet can be shared with patients and their families.**

## Key Messages:

- *To provide a brief overview of Muslim practices and requirements around end-of-life care and death.*
- *To encourage staff to have the confidence to support patients & relatives about their personal needs and wishes.*
- *To be a simple reference at this most difficult time of death*



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# Introduction

Delivering high-quality care to patients of Muslim faith (Islam) requires healthcare professionals to have basic knowledge of the differences in cultural and spiritual values.

The Muslim faith encompasses many ethnicities with diverse views regarding illness and healthcare.

This guidance aims to describe practices healthcare professionals should be made aware of, to provide faith and culturally sensitive end of life care to Muslim patients and their families.

When providing care to Muslim patients, it is important to understand the impact the Islamic faith has on the provision of healthcare.

When the cultures of Muslims around the world are compared, there are common features found in all countries, and the variations represent the basic features of the Muslim religious tenets.

However, Muslims are not a homogeneous group, and different groups may have varying cultures and needs even though they share the same religious practices.

We often find that behaviours are shaped by cultural practices that are not always in concordance with basic religious practices.

Health care professionals should avoid making assumptions about the needs of Muslim patients or their families.

The best practice is to seek guidance from the family members themselves or failing that, the hospital chaplaincy department or the Muslim Chaplain directly.

You may also contact Gloucester Muslim Bereavement Council using the contact details found on page 11.

## End of Life in Islam

The preservation of life is considered paramount in Islam. However, Islam also recognises that death is an inevitable part of human existence and is predestined by Allah (God). Muslims will often accept an onset of illness and subsequent death of their loved one.

In medically-futile situations where life support equipment is used to prolong organ functions, the condition of the patient needs to be carefully explained to the family and what this will mean going forward.

Medical professionals should also ensure that the family fully understand any 'do not resuscitate' orders that may have been put in place.

If death appears imminent, a Muslim patient's family may wish to perform certain religious practices that are customary for an individual approaching death.

These rituals performed at the death bed are not generally elaborate or complicated. The most basic will be for family members to be permitted access and be allowed to be seated near the bed of the patient.

This is so that they are able to read verses from the Qur'an softly for their loved one, praying for the peaceful departure of the soul.

If the patient's family is not present, healthcare providers should do their best to ensure, they are able to communicate with the next of kin, or try to organise a Muslim representative from the hospital. You can contact the hospital chaplaincy to seek advice or contact the Muslim Chaplain directly in such circumstances.



# Items of Religious Significance

**Quran** - Is the Holy book in Islam. Muslims believe the Quran to be revelation from Allah (**God**).

**Zam Zam water** - The Zam Zam well is located within the blessed Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, east of the Kaaba, the holiest place in Islam.

In Islam, Zam Zam is a miraculous source of water. Millions of pilgrims visit the well each year while performing the Hajj or Umrah (pilgrimage) in order to drink its water.

Most Muslims will possess a small quantity of Zam Zam. One can drink Zam Zam water in its pure form, or diluted in tap water.

Family members will often give their loved ones Zam Zam to aid recovery or bring them comfort during their last stages.

**Tasbih** - Islamic prayer beads, which are used by Muslims as a means for counting a prayer or supplication, which may be repeated for a prescribed number of times



## Preferences Proceeding Death

In the Muslim faith, a person on whom the signs of death are clearly visible is called a 'muhtadar'. If such signs are apparent, it is preferred practice (Sunnah) to let that person lie on their **RIGHT side facing the direction of Mecca, (Qiblah)**.

It is preferred that the bed of the patient be turned so that the patient is able to face towards the direction of Qiblah. The direction can be acquired by contacting the Muslim Chaplain.

There are also apps available that will show the Qiblah direction. It is also appropriate for the patient to be positioned to lie on their back with their feet towards the Qiblah, and the head slightly raised with a cushion so that they are able to face the Qiblah. It is also important to ensure any bed linen is clean and not soiled.

Please note. The treatment and comfort of the patient is always priority, therefore if moving the bed is difficult due to space or the presence of medical equipment, then this should be avoided.

For Muslim's who may be present during this time it is advised that they recite verses or chapters from the Quran to ease the moment of death. These verses or chapters are often referred to as "Surah". The prescribed Surah's for such occasions are; Surah Yasin (No: 36), Surah Ar Ra'd (No: 13) and Surah Baqarah (No: 2).

To find the numbers of these Surah in the Quran cubes, please consult the manual, which accompanies the cube. Surah Yasin for example, which is most commonly recited, is often number 36 on most Quran cubes

## Practicalities Immediately After Death

If possible, healthcare professionals should handle the body of a deceased Muslim as little as possible. Muslims believe that the soul remains close to the body and maintains a connection for a period (until burial), therefore, the body feels discomfort with any pressure that may be applied after death.

Members of staff are required to remove any Intravenous lines, such as canulas as well as drains and catheters, which may be present in the deceased. If there is a risk of leakage of body fluids from removal, then lines may have been left in situ, although these should be clamped and cut close to the skin.

Soon after death the following should be done with the help of family members if possible:

The deceased must remain fully clothed and member of staff should only handle with gloves and preferably by person(s) of the same gender where this can be arranged or request assistance from Muslim chaplain

1. The eyes should be closed by applying gentle downward pressure on the eye lids.
2. Remove any dentures and close the mouth, this can be done by applying gently upward pressure on the chin while holding the top of the head. If needed, tie a length of cotton bandage under the chin and around the head to keep the mouth closed.
3. Remove any jewellery such as rings, necklaces, bracelets and nose studs. (It is especially important to remove rings before swelling occurs).
4. Straighten the limbs carefully and gently. If they will not straighten do not force them.
5. Place the feet together and if necessary, bind at the ankles.
6. The body should be covered from head to toe with a clean sheet and shrouded that is not transparent and should remain covered throughout, and placed in a body bag ready for handing over to the porters

## Certification & Body Release

Muslims require swift burials therefore senior nursing staff should try to ensure that the necessary documentation, such as the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD), is issued by the Doctor who can be authorised to do so or contact the Medical Examiner as quickly as possible.

During normal working hour's the MCCD will be issued through the hospital's Bereavement Services office however in an out of hours setting, senior ward staff and family members will need to contact **GMBC (See Page 10)** who will liaise with the hospital Duty Manager. If collection is to be made out of normal working hours, also at weekends and holidays for arrangements for release of the deceased patient

Ward staff should also notify the hospital porters to move the body as soon as possible, to the mortuary as any delay in this may delay release and possibly the burial itself

Note: - The above procedure only applies if the Burial is being undertaken by GMBC (Gloucester Muslim Bereavement Council) details on page 10

### Please note For Burial undertaken by GMBC

To comply with the formalities of the law of this country, which requires that the death is certified and registered. GMBC have a special dispensation for Green Burial order to be issued upon presentation of the MCCD or if applicable Coroners Form 101 so there is no delay for Burial to take place.

GMBC or the Families next of kin will arrange for an appointment to register the death within 5 days, with the local registration office.

Please do not delay this process.

## Stillbirths and miscarriages

*The hospital will ask whether the family will take care of the disposal of the foetus or stillborn remains or whether the hospital should do so.*

*In every circumstance, please ensure that family opt for carrying out the arrangements themselves through GMBC who will provide a free service .*

Islamically a foetus is defined as a morsel of flesh / blood / water if less than 120 days inside a mother's womb. It becomes human after 120 days (17 weeks + 1 day).

A birth given after 120 days of pregnancy that is stillborn should be given a name. If it is difficult to determine the sex of the child, then a neutral name suitable for both boys and girls should be given.

Both a foetus and stillborn must be buried. It is important that you do this promptly, especially for “non-viable foetuses”, because if you do not then the hospital will make its own arrangements for disposal and your baby will be denied a Muslim burial.

If a baby is stillborn, you will require the following paperwork needed for burial shown in bold below: -

**Dr or Midwife to issue the following as soon as possible: -**

If a baby is stillborn before 24 weeks of pregnancy

**NVF Form (Non-Viable Foetus Form).** You do not need to register the death.

If Stillbirth in the 24<sup>th</sup> or higher week of pregnancy

**Medical Certificate of Stillbirth** Certificate of Registration of Stillbirth will be required and issued by the Registrar before burial can take place.

For all babies born with any signs of life who then die shortly after birth, their birth and death must be registered.

**(PLEASE CONTACT THE MUSLIM CHAPLAIN OR GMBC  
CONTACT DETAILS ON BACK PAGE 11.)**

# New Medical Examiner System

All deaths that occur in a hospital will need to be referred to a Medical Examiner who will be based at the hospital. The Medical Examiner will be required to come to an agreement with the consultant as to the cause of death. The medical Cause of Death Certificate will require the Medical Examiner's endorsement.

Unfortunately this additional layer can often result in causing some inevitable delays depending on the circumstances and availability of the Medical Examiner. GMBC together with NBC (National Burial Council) are currently lobbying and working together with the relevant government departments to ensure that a new more effective & efficient system be put in place thus alleviating any additional burden & delays due to out of hour death on the bereaved families.

## ***The religious importance of burying quickly:***

In accordance with the Shariah (Islamic law), the burial should not be delayed on any account or for the arrival of family members or for any other reason.

After death, bathing and shrouding should be performed as quickly as possible. If it is possible to arrange the burial of the deceased in the morning, one should not delay until late afternoon.

Abu Hurayrah (radi Allahu 'anh) has narrated that the Prophet (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

**“Make haste in burying the deceased: because if it is the Janazah of a pious servant, then enjoin this goodness with its station quickly; and if it is the Janazah of an evil person then quickly dispose of such a load from your shoulders.”**

Sometimes, on account of a certain relative being overseas and this person's inability to arrive quickly, burial is delayed for up to two or even three days. Shariah has prohibited such a practice.

# Essential Contacts



**GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSLIM  
BEREAVMENT COUNCIL**

Supporting the Muslim Communities in Association with the Mosques in Gloucestershire



## KEY CONTACT INFORMATION

On the death of a family member, please call one of the following numbers between the hours of 8.00am - 10.00pm.

(Please leave a message outside of these Hours)



**Mr Ismail Mehter: 07976 298107**



**Mr Zakaria Jeewa: 07746 184946**



**Mr Yusuf Bhana: 07970 545996**

FOR GMBC TO MAKE THE NECESSARY ARRANGEMENTS FOR YOUR DECEASED,  
PLEASE FILL NOTICE ON THE FOLLOWING LINK TO GIVE YOUR CONSENT

<http://masjidenoor.org.uk/gmbc/form/>

### Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Address: Great Western Rd, Gloucester GL1 3NN

Phone: 0300 422 2222

### Cheltenham General Hospital

Address: Sandford Rd, Cheltenham GL53 7AN

Phone: 0300 422 2222

### Muslim Chaplain

Department of Spiritual Care,

Phone: 0300 422 6200

CARING FOR PATIENTS NEARING THE END OF LIFE



Correspondence Address: C/O Masjid E Noor, 44/46 Ryecroft Street, Gloucester, GL1 4LY

Email : [masjidenoorgloucester@gmail.com](mailto:masjidenoorgloucester@gmail.com) <http://masjidenoor.org.uk/gmbc/>

