

# ***A Factsheet for Hospices and Hospitals:***

## **Death and Suffering from the Islamic Perspective & the Practical Duties of Nurses/Caregivers towards Muslim Patients**

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### **Suffering in Islam**

- Suffering is the struggle a being goes through in its life when it is met with difficulties in order to become nearer to God (Allah), to understand His supreme Merciful Will and to obtain true contentment in this life and the next. A being refers to all types of creation of God and thus does not exclude groups such as animals, *jinn*s (genies) and angels and even potential forms of life such as a foetus that has become “ensouled.” This is summed up by the following verse of the Qur’an:

*Verily, We shall put you to test with some fear, and hunger, and with some loss of wealth, lives, and offspring. And (O Muhammad) convey good tidings to those who are patient, who say, when inflicted by hardship, "Verily we are of God and verily to Him shall we return;" upon them is the blessings of Allah and His mercy. (2:155)*

### **Views of Classical Muslim Scholars**

- Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) poses the question that if God is so merciful, why doesn't he remove human afflictions? Al-Ghazali's answer is: “yet there is no evil in existence which does not contain some good within it, and were that evil to be eliminated, the good within it would be nullified and the final result would be an evil worse than the evil containing the good.” He also says: “The meaning of *Rahman* should be a kind of mercy beyond the powers of people, and related to happiness in the next life. The Infinitely Good is He who loves men, first by creating them; second, by guiding them to faith and to the means of salvation; third, by making them happy in the next world; and fourth, by granting them the contemplation of His noble face.”<sup>2</sup>
- Allamah Hilli (1250-1325) states that if God understands that there is some benefit in the suffering, He may delay its benefit for the sufferer either in order for the sufferer to experience the reward at a later date in this earthly life or in the hereafter where the sufferer can reap the full rewards of God's blessing. This appears to reflect the verse of

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<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghazali, Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad., *Al-Maqsad al-Asna fi Sharh Asma Allah al-Husna* (The Ninety Nine Beautiful Names of God) (The Islamic Texts Society, 2007), p.54-55

the Qur'an which states, "No one knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do" (32:17).<sup>3</sup> He further states:

- "It is sufficient for Allah to give him recompense, that is, that He divides it up into periods or that He shows grace to him in some such way...and if he be of those who are punished, Allah will cancel a part of his punishment because of his former sufferings, in such a way that the lightening of it will not be evident to him, since He will divide the measure of it into periods."

### **Death in Islam**

- Death (*mawt*) is God's decision but we regulate our life according to our freewill. Our soul (*nafs*) passes from one abode to the hereafter and before the Day of Judgement where our deeds will be evaluated, the soul rests in an intermediary abode where it continues to receive the mercy of God, has the opportunity to repent and see loved ones. The soul is also able to receive any blessings from good works and prayers done in his/her name in the world. Death signals mercy of God to return to Him as opposed to punishment. The Qur'an states:

*"(It is He) Who created death and life that He may try you- which of you is best in deeds; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving," (67:2) and "O soul that are at rest! Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing (Him), So enter among My servants, And enter into My garden" (89:27-30)*

### **Death Rituals in Islam**

- Face dead body towards *qibla* (direction of Mecca)
- Immediately pray for deceased, ask for forgiveness, recite Qur'an, supplications and inform relatives to do the same
- Arrange for deceased to be buried within 24 hours if possible
- Perform *ghusl* (ceremonial washing) of body
- Shroud the body in *kafan* (covering; 3 pieces of plain cloth)
- Settle any debts and ask forgiveness from anyone he/she may have hurt
- Allow close family members to pay last respects
- Perform *Salat al-Mayyit* (the prayer for the deceased) where body is laid in front and people pray behind
- Bury body in graveyard but before doing so, recite *talqeen* (instruction, dictation) to remind the deceased of the existence of One God and fundamentals of faith
- Once buried, recite *Surat al-Fatihah* (chapter of the Opening) and carry out good works and charity in the deceased's name for him/her to receive blessings
- Mourning period usually lasts 40 days and regular visits to the graveyard are recommended for the benefit of family members and deceased

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<sup>3</sup>Hilli, Hasan b. Yusuf b. Ali ibn Al-Mutahhar. 1958. *Al-Babu Al-Hadi Ashar – A Treatise on the Principles of Shi'ite Theology*. Translated by William McElwee Miller. London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain, p.53.

## **10 Practical Duties of a Nurse/Caregiver towards Muslim Patients**

- 1) Understand that a devout Muslim patient would like to pray 5 times a day and needs help to carry out his/her ablution and perform his/her prayer.
- 2) If the Muslim patient is comfortable to share his background, find out if he/she is Sunni or a Shi'a (the two main sects in Islam) and if they require a particular Imam or mosque to conduct the prayer and rites for them.
- 3) Have several contacts of Imams and mosques at hand for general advice and because Muslim families are encouraged to bury their loved ones within 24 hours.
- 4) Muslim patients may feel anxiety about their bad deeds, debts and unresolved relationships. Offering to contact people or taking down any important information would give them comfort knowing that they can resolve an issue.
- 5) Help facilitate Muslim family members to see and pray for the deceased person. Generally, there is a lot of family and communal support as death is not a private issue for Muslims.
- 6) If no Imam, Muslim chaplain or family are present, ask the Muslim patient if he/she would be comfortable if a fellow Christian or Jewish chaplain could pray to God on their behalf.
- 7) If no one family member is present, perhaps the nurse can recite a prayer on their behalf, if the patient wishes for them to do so. They may recite recommend chapters of the Qur'an in English such as *Surat al-Fatihah (ch:1)*, *Surat al-Yasin (ch:36)* and *Surat al-Mulk (ch:67)*.
- 8) Help facilitate the issuance of the death certificate so that the body can be taken to the mosque/appropriate facility and given ceremonial washing.
- 9) The family will request moving the hospital bed towards the direction of Mecca. You can assist them by finding out the direction of the qibla (*search: 'qibla finder google' on your phone with the location on*).
- 10) Like any patient, Muslims simply require support and a listening ear. Understanding their religious and practical needs goes a long way in giving comfort to them.

### **A Prayer about Death by Prophet Muhammad's Great Grandson: Imam Zayn al-Abidin<sup>4</sup>**

1- O God, bless Muhammad and his Household,  
spare us drawn out expectations  
and cut them short in us through sincerity of works,  
that we may not hope expectantly for completing an hour after an hour,  
closing a day after a day,  
joining a breath to a breath,  
or overtaking a step with a step!

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<sup>4</sup>From the Psalms of Islam – Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah translated by William Chittick, no.40 :<https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zaynul-abidin/40-his-supplication-when-death-was-mentioned>

2- Keep us safe from the delusions of expectations,  
make us secure from their evils,  
set up death before us in display & let not our remembering of it come and go!

3- Appoint for us from among the righteous works a work  
through which we will feel the homecoming to Thee as slow  
and crave a quick joining with Thee,  
so that death may be our intimate abode with which we are intimate,  
our familiar place toward which we yearn,  
and our next of kin whose coming we love!

4- When Thou bringest it to us and sendest it down upon us,  
make us happy with it as a visitor, comfort us with its arrival,  
make us not wretched through entertaining it,  
degrade us not through its visit,  
and appoint it one of the gates to Thy forgiveness  
and the keys to Thy mercy!

5- Make us die guided, not astray,  
obedient, not averse,  
repentant, not disobedient or persisting,  
O He who guarantees the repayment of the good-doers  
and seeks to set right the work of the corrupt!

### ***Rumi says:***

*This place is a dream.  
Only a sleeper considers  
it real. Then death comes  
like dawn, and you wake  
up laughing at what you  
thought was your grief.*

~ Rumi ~

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### ***Contacts of Muslim community centres in Chelmsford, Essex***

- 1) **Chelmsford Muslim Society:** <https://www.chelmsfordmuslimsociety.org/> (Tel: 01245 261563/07866 543172; E-mail: [info@chelmsfordmosque.co.uk](mailto:info@chelmsfordmosque.co.uk))
- 2) **Muslim Shi'a Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Essex (Ali-Ridha Islamic Centre):**  
<https://www.essexjamaat.org.uk/> (Tel: 07796978158/07973 680044; E-mail: [webmaster@essexjamaat.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@essexjamaat.org.uk) )