



Caring for the **Buddhist** Patient

Buddhism was founded in the Indian sub-continent about 2500 years ago. Its founder became known as BUDDHA - the enlightened or awakened one.

There are a growing number of Buddhists in Britain, from a variety of different schools.

SIGNIFICANT TERMS

NIRVANA - The state of infinite perfection which every individual Buddhist is seeking to achieve.

THERAVADA - The school of orthodox Buddhism.

MAHAYANA - The more liberal school of Buddhism of which **ZEN BUDDHISM** is a branch.

BHIKKU - Buddhist monk.

SANGHA - Buddhist monastic order to which both monks and nuns belong.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

DIET - Dietary views vary among Buddhists. Many are vegetarians because of their respect for all life.

HYGIENE - Some Buddhists have strict rules of hygiene, and need to wash before meditation, as well as after urination and defecation.

PAIN RELIEF - A Buddhist who is dying will usually wish to do so with an unclouded mind and may be reluctant to take pain relieving drugs. This may also apply to those who are not terminally ill. Careful explanation must be given so that it is understood that pain - relieving drugs need not impair the senses.

FASTING - Practice varies but most fasting days occur on New Moon and Full Moon days. Other festival days include Buddha's birthday, his enlightenment, and his first sermon. On these occasions many Buddhists would not wish to eat after 12 noon.

SLEEPING - Some Buddhists may prefer to sleep on the floor.

PRAYER

Many Buddhists will be accustomed to the practice of meditation, and would appreciate peace and quiet for this. Patients who are mobile could use a room adjacent to the Hospital Chapel. If the patient has a BUDDHA figure he/she may find great comfort in having it placed beside their bed together with flowers and an incense stick. The figure must be treated with great respect, and when put away should be placed high up or covered with a cloth.

The Buddhist Scriptures must also be treated with respect and nothing placed on top of them.

**AS DEATH
APPROACHES**

Buddhists believe that the state of mind at death will influence the character of rebirth. Therefore they will wish to achieve calm, buoyancy, and joy. Most Buddhist patients will wish their condition and progress to be explained to them with openness and honesty as this will enable them to make their own preparation for death. It is important that the patient/family is enabled to contact a Buddhist monk (preferably of the same school) as death nears. Most Buddhists will know how to do this. If the ministry of a Buddhist is not available they may accept the presence of the Hospital Chaplain.

TIBETAN BUDDHISM has a very strong following amongst westerners and Tibetan Buddhists may wish for part of the Tibetan Book of the Dead to be read to them as death approaches. Some form of chanting may be used to influence a peaceful state of mind and a single room would be appreciated. Buddhists will often demonstrate a very positive attitude towards death because it is seen as part of the life cycle leading ultimately to Nirvana.

LAST OFFICES

When a Buddhist patient dies it is important that a Buddhist monk is informed as soon as possible.

Many Buddhist patients will have already given a "Who to contact" name. Ideally the body should not be moved before the minister arrives. The minister will wish to say prayers with the deceased and this may take up to an hour. All the usual last offices may be performed by the nursing staff. It would be appreciated if the nurse could speak to the deceased with respect and kindness, explaining what is being done for them. The body should be wrapped in a plain sheet.

Buddhists are usually cremated. There are no objections to post mortem or organ donation.

EVERY BUDDHIST PATIENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND PRACTICE MAY VARY