



## Caring for the Christian Patient

### **Christians broadly agree on the basics of their faith but vary in its practice.**

There are a number of Christian denominations represented in this country, the largest of which is the **CHURCH OF ENGLAND** or **ANGLICAN** church. Although many who describe themselves as CHURCH OF ENGLAND may not attend church regularly, others are very committed to their faith.

About 10% of the population are **ROMAN CATHOLIC**, and many ROMAN CATHOLICS are very devout. A large number of Christian worshippers attend a **FREE CHURCH** (e.g. **Methodist, Baptist, United Reform, Congregational, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Pentecostal, Community Church, Church of Scotland**).

There are also a number of **ORTHODOX** Christians in Britain, mainly of Greek, Russian and Serb nationalities, most of whom will be in touch with their own Priest, or may accept the ministry of the R.C. / C. of E. Chaplain.

Many Christians will expect to see a Chaplain of their own denomination during their hospital stay, and it is important that this opportunity is offered.

#### **SIGNIFICANT TERMS**

**HOLY COMMUNION/THE SACRAMENT** - the receiving of bread and wine symbolising the body and blood of Jesus is important in most Christian traditions, and may be especially so to a dying patient. The appropriate Chaplain can bring the communion to the bedside.

**ANOINTING / THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK** - the use of Holy oil to make the sign of the cross on the patient's forehead. This is very important, especially in the ROMAN CATHOLIC church, and in some ANGLICAN traditions. It is sometimes called the LAST RITES but can be asked for at anytime.

**CONFESSION** - the making of peace with God in the presence of a priest. Again, this is especially important in the ROMAN CATHOLIC church, and in some ANGLICAN traditions.

#### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**BIBLE** - Christians often expect to find a Bible available to them in hospital. These are normally placed in the bedside locker by the Gideons, or the Chaplain can provide one if needed.

**DIET** - There are some Christians who wish to observe Friday as a no meat day, and they should be offered a vegetarian alternative. Some Christians may wish to fast before receiving Holy Communion. Some Christians would wish to fast on ASH WEDNESDAY.

**PRAYER**

Prayer is of great importance to devout Christians, although there are no specific times for prayer. Some patients will appreciate the bed curtains drawn when they pray. Some may wish to see the Chaplain for prayer/Holy Communion before an operation. If so it is essential that the relevant Chaplain is called. Some Christians bring a rosary (prayer beads), cross or crucifix, small icon (religious painting), or a vessel of Holy Water into hospital with them. These must be treated with respect.

**AS DEATH APPROACHES**

Prayers for the dying, or prayers to commit those who have died to God's care, may be appreciated both by committed Christians, (especially those of the ROMAN CATHOLIC faith) and by those who would not necessarily regard themselves as "religious". If the patient or family request this the appropriate Chaplain should be called.

Parents of **babies** who are stillborn, or who die before 24 weeks of gestation should always be offered the ministry of a Chaplain to bless their child.

Often **BAPTISM** is requested for babies or children, and occasionally adults, when death is thought to be imminent. The Hospital Chaplain of the appropriate denomination should be called immediately. In the absence of the Chaplain a member of staff may perform an emergency baptism, using the words "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.", sprinkling water on the patient's forehead, and making the sign of the cross. All emergency baptisms must be reported to the Chaplain.

**LAST OFFICES**

These are performed according to normal procedure. There are no objections on religious grounds to post-mortems or organ donation. The deceased will be buried or cremated according to preference.

**RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS**

Easter and Christmas are the most important festivals. Patients should if possible be helped to attend Chapel services at these times, or the Chaplain be called to their bedside. There are other festivals during the year, and patients may wish to see a Chaplain at these times. Sunday is an important day of worship.

**EVERY CHRISTIAN PATIENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND PRACTICE MAY VARY**