



## Caring for the Jain Patient

**There are about 30,000 Jains in the UK, almost all Indian in origin. Jainism and Hinduism, the majority religion in India have existed side by side for thousands of years.**

They have different origins and histories but share some traditions and practices. Some Jains may give their religion as Hindu as they may not expect the Jain religion to be known. There are at present no official Jain religious leaders in the UK but some members of the community teach, advise, and have a pastoral role.

### **SIGNIFICANT TERMS**

**TIRTHANKARAS** - Jains honour/worship 24 teachers or pathfinders for their faith.

**MAHAVIRA** - (599-527 BC) the 24th most recent Tirthankara, who revived Jainism.

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

**MODESTY** - Female patients will usually prefer a female doctor/nurse. For modesty reasons, placing a Jain patient in a mixed sex bay must be avoided.

**DIET** - All Jains are vegetarians. Some may refuse root vegetables, some may be unable to eat certain foods at certain times of the year, so it is important to ask the patient what is acceptable food for them. Some relatives may prefer to bring in freshly cooked food from home so they can be sure it does not contain prohibited ingredients. Some Jains will only eat in daylight hours as a matter of religious discipline.

**FASTING** - Fasting is important in Jain life, because all eating and drinking is bound to harm some life forms, however tiny. Women are especially likely to fast. Some fast regularly on certain days of the month, and at Paryushana parva (see below).

**MEDICATION** - Most Jains who are fasting would take essential medication. Some may prefer not to take antibiotics because of the prohibition against harming any form of life. If antibiotics are essential they would probably be accepted, but with regret.

### **PRAYER**

Jain patients may bring with them a string of prayer beads (mala), religious books and pictures. If a member of staff needs to touch any of these items permission should be asked, and hands should be washed before doing so. Most Jains would prefer privacy for private prayer - they may wish to chant, or to listen to tape recordings of prayers and holy readings.

**AS DEATH APPROACHES**

Prayer is very important at this time. The patient may also want certain people to visit to make confession and to ask forgiveness. For many families it is extremely important that everyone is there when a loved one is dying. It is considered ideal for a Jain to die in a state of meditation, and relatives may wish to play religious tapes or to chant quietly. Some may wish to burn incense sticks.

**LAST OFFICES**

The family may wish to provide a plain white gown or shroud for the deceased. They are unlikely to have special concerns about who touches the body after death although it may be wise to check this with them. They may wish to assist with the normal Last Offices. Post-mortem is usually seen as disrespectful to the body, but this will depend how orthodox the patient is. Organ donation may be acceptable. All Jains are cremated, and it is traditional to hold the service within 24-48 hours of death.

**RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS**

These include: **MAHAVIRA JAYANTI** (March/April) which celebrates the birth of their teacher, **DIWALI** (October/November) same day as the Hindu festival, and **PARYUSHANA PARVA** (August/September) which lasts eight days.

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