



Caring for the Jehovah Witness Patient

There are about 132,000 baptised adult Jehovah Witnesses in the UK. Most of them belong to a local congregation of about 100 people.

There are no salaried ministers but each congregation has lay Elders who have pastoral and spiritual responsibility and authority. They will visit and support a dying patient and his/her family.

SIGNIFICANT TERMS **KINGDOM HALL** - The meeting place of the local Jehovah Witness assembly.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS **BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS** - Jehovah Witnesses believe that a human being may not sustain his/her life with the blood of another creature. This belief is very deeply held, and means that a patient is likely to refuse a blood transfusion whatever the possible consequences. Many Jehovah Witnesses carry advance directives requesting that medical staff do not use blood or blood products as a form of treatment. Most Witnesses are well informed about their religious teaching, and about their right to refuse treatment. Some will accept blood fractions - e.g. patients with haemophilia may accept Factor V111. However, individual beliefs vary.

CHILDREN - Most Jehovah Witness parents will refuse blood transfusions for their children. In extreme circumstances this may mean that their wishes must be over-ruled by a court order. However, local Elders are very knowledgeable about medical issues and possible alternatives. It is very important that parents, and adult patients, be enabled to make contact with their local Elder.

BLOOD TESTS - Blood is usually seen by Jehovah Witnesses to represent life itself. Specimens must therefore be treated with respect, and disposed of with care.

ORGAN TRANSPLANT - Some Jehovah Witnesses may refuse to receive an organ because the transplanted organ may contain residual blood

DIET - Jehovah Witnesses believe it is forbidden to eat blood or blood products. Although meat is usually acceptable, because animals are bled after slaughter, some Jehovah Witnesses may be vegetarian.

PRAYER Patients may wish to pray silently before eating and at other times. They may pray with visiting Elders and relatives and friends. Curtains should be closed for privacy.

AS DEATH APPROACHES

Congregational support is important, and a dying patient may receive a number of visitors. If this causes difficulties for the patient it may be possible to talk to the visiting Elder to ask for help in regulating visitors. Although there is no formal religious ritual as a person is dying, the opportunity for quiet private prayer with a local Elder may be appreciated.

LAST OFFICES

Last Offices are performed as normal, unless the family have special wishes. The body should be wrapped in a plain sheet. There is no religious prohibition against post-mortem, but most Jehovah Witnesses refuse them if there is no legal requirement. There is no religious prohibition against organ donation. Jehovah Witnesses may be buried or cremated according to preference.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Jehovah Witnesses do not respect Sunday as a holy day, nor do they celebrate Christmas, Easter or birthdays.

EVERY JEHOVAH WITNESS PATIENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND PRACTICE MAY VARY