



Caring for the Jewish Patient

The Jewish religion is over 4000 years old and has a very rich heritage. However, within the British Jewish community there is a wide spectrum of belief, and much variation in observance.

The two main strands of Judaism in this country are the **ORTHODOX**, whose members adhere very closely to traditional Jewish values, and the less strict **REFORM** or **PROGRESSIVE** Jews.

SIGNIFICANT TERMS

SYNAGOGUE - Traditional Jewish place of worship, although not all Jews belong to a synagogue.

RABBI - Religious leader (teacher). Observant Jewish families may wish to consult their own Rabbi about issues relating to the patient's treatment and care.

TORAH - The main Holy book (the first 5 books of the Christian Old Testament). Observant Jews may keep a copy of the Torah and a **SIDDUR** - prayer book - by their bed.

TALLITH - Traditional prayer shawl worn by men for morning prayer. Some orthodox Jews may wish to wear a miniature tallith throughout the day. It is usually removed at night.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

MODESTY - In very orthodox Judaism it is immodest for men to touch women other than their wives, and consideration must be given to this. Some Jews may wish to keep their heads covered, and some to keep their limbs covered. Respect should be shown to these wishes as far as possible. For modesty reasons, placing a Jewish patient in a mixed sex bay must be avoided.

DIET - Many Jews will ask for **KOSHER** food. In essence this means that only specially prepared meat (lamb, beef or chicken - **NO** pork in any form, e.g. ham, bacon, sausages) and only fish with fins and scales can be eaten. Milk and meat must not be eaten together. Some Jews will require that only strictly Kosher meals be ordered, others will simply not eat pork or shellfish. The patient should always be consulted about his/her dietary observance.

SHABBAT - (Sabbath) the Jewish day of rest begins just before sunset on Friday and ends after sunset on Saturday. Its traditional ceremonies and prayers are very important to many observant Jews and patients who wish to do so should be helped to keep them where possible. The lighting of two candles, some bread and some wine, are a traditional welcome for the Sabbath, and friends may help with this. Patients should be asked about what they can do on the Sabbath, and simple acts like turning lights, or the television, on and off might be appreciated. Minor treatments should be avoided on the Sabbath.

HYGIENE - Observant Jews wash each hand 3 times on waking. They would also wish to wash their hands before a meal which includes bread.

PRAYER

Traditionally a Jew prays three times each day - morning, afternoon and evening. A blessing is also said before and after eating. Privacy for prayer - even simply by drawing the bed curtains – is important. Men will always cover their heads with a skull cap (**KIPPA**) whilst praying.

AS DEATH APPROACHES

Jewish law forbids anything which may hasten death - this includes moving a dying patient. A dying patient may wish to recite the Hebrew **SHEMA**, or to make a death bed confession. He may wish to see a Rabbi. There is no special ceremony of last rites but the dying patient should not be left alone.

LAST OFFICES

After death a Rabbi should be contacted immediately. If this is not possible (e.g. because it is Sabbath or a major festival) the eyes of the deceased should be closed, the body laid flat with the hands open, arms parallel and close to the body and legs straight. The body should be covered in a plain white sheet and relatives or friends may wish to observe the tradition of keeping vigil by the body. This should be facilitated where possible. Jewish burial should take place as soon as possible after death. Post-mortem examinations are not permitted unless the Coroner requests this. A Rabbi should be consulted.

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

The major festivals are the Jewish New Year (celebrated during September), **YOM KIPPUR**, the day of Atonement, which is marked during September or October and is spent in **FASTING** and prayer, **SUCCOT** (the Jewish "Harvest Festival") celebrated 5 days after Yom Kippur, **PESACH**, the Passover festival celebrated during March or April, and **SHAVUOT** which celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments, and is observed during May or June. In addition there are several minor festivals.

EVERY JEWISH PATIENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND PRACTICE MAY VARY