

SA Palliative Care Community Pharmacy Update

A joint initiative of South Australian Palliative Care Services

Ahmad is collecting scripts for his mother, who you know to be Islamic, tells you the family are preparing to provide end-of-life care for her at home.

Background

Pharmacists should have a basic understanding of values, beliefs and traditions held by those in their community. Islamic beliefs and practices are guided by the Qur'an (holy book), the five pillars of Islam, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Muslims often turn to these as important guides for living, particularly when facing challenges such as illness and death. There are personal and cultural variations among Muslims from different cultural and geographical backgrounds. A Muslim from West Africa may observe Islam differently compared with a Muslim from Indonesia.

Communication

Pharmacists must explore the patient's preferences for how much information they want to know about conditions and medicines, and the extent of sharing information with others while preserving the patient's autonomy and cultural preferences.

Muslim families are often closely involved in clinical decision making. If a patient is incapacitated, families may discuss decisions collectively and may seek guidance from a respected family member or religious leader. At times, family may request the clinician not to share certain diagnoses with the patient.

Becoming familiar with common Arabic words or phrases may help pharmacists better understand patients' perspectives;

Insha'Allah: "If God wills it"; often said when hoping or planning for something in the future.

Alhamdulillah: "Praise be to God"; usually said in gratitude when something good is noticed.

Masha'Allah: "What God has willed"; used when appreciating something good.

Haram: Strictly forbidden.

Imam: A Muslim religious scholar or leader.

(access free translators: tisonational.gov.au)

Some medicine considerations

- > At times a patient may refuse opioids or benzodiazepines despite being in pain. Rather than suspecting non-compliance, further inquiry may reveal concern about excessive sedation affecting their ability to perform the five daily prayers, or about being able to recite the Shahada (declaration of faith) near the end of life. Relief of suffering is permissible in Islam and symptom control should be discussed with the patient and family. Reassure patients that medicines can be carefully titrated to maximise comfort while minimising sedation.
- > Muslims who are sick or elderly are exempt from fasting during Ramadan, although some individuals may still wish to fast. Medication timing and dosing may therefore require sensitive discussion.
- > Some Muslims may prefer to avoid medicines containing alcohol or ingredients of non-halal or porcine origin (e.g. Creon, gelatin). Pharmacists can discuss available options and explore acceptable alternatives where possible.

Useful resources

- > [Caring for Muslim patients](#)
- > [Top 10 tips palliative caring of Muslim people.](#)

With thanks to Dr Anas Safri for his contribution

For more information

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This update is intended to provide practical up to date and factual information relating to pharmacy and medicines management in the setting of Palliative Care and is based on critical review of available evidence. Individual patient circumstances must be considered when applying this information. Please feel free to distribute this update further to interested colleagues.