

Caring for the Baha'i patient



The Baha'i faith was established in Iran in 1844. The founder of the faith - BAHÁ'U'LLAH - taught that all the great religions come from God, and that they are all fulfilled in the Baha'i faith. The religion is now widespread, and there are about 200 Baha'i assemblies in the UK. Because members come from very diverse backgrounds a translator may sometimes be needed. Baha'is have a great respect for Doctors, and are encouraged to seek the best medical care when they are ill.

Significant Terms

NAWRUZ - Baha'i New Year Festival, celebrated on the 21st March.

DIET - There are no special dietary prohibitions, and although some Baha'i may be vegetarian, this is of their own choosing, and not a religious requirement. The Baha'i will not drink alcohol, except when prescribed by a Doctor.

Special Considerations

FASTING - Members of the Baha'i faith fast from sunrise to sunset each year from 2nd March - 20th March. Those who are sick, young children, the elderly and expectant mothers are exempt from this fast, but some patients may still wish to observe it by eating only before sunrise and after sunset. It is helpful to remember that this is a significant time for them. The period of fasting is used to mark the end of the old year, and to make spiritual preparation for the new year, which begins on 21st March.

Prayer

Members of the Baha'i faith are required to say an obligatory prayer each day, and to read from the Scriptures of the faith every morning and evening. In illness they are officially exempted from obligatory prayer but they have a great belief in the power of prayer in healing, and the patient may therefore greatly appreciate the opportunity for some privacy in prayer.

As Death Approaches

There are no clergy in the Baha'i faith, but each assembly has its own leaders. It may be that the patient, or the patient's family may appreciate the presence of their own spiritual leaders, and it would simply be helpful to discuss this with them. They will almost certainly know how to make contact with their own religious representative.

Last Offices

The body of the deceased must be treated with great respect. Last Offices may be performed according to the usual procedure, and the body washed and wrapped in plain cotton or silk. A special ring will be placed on the patient's finger, and this must not be removed. There is no religious objection to Post-mortem examination, and organ donation is regarded as very commendable. Baha'is object to cremation, and burial should take place within one hour's journey of the place of death.

Religious Festivals

The Baha'i Nawruz - New Year festival on 21st March, as described above, is very important in the Baha'i faith, and patients may long to be at home on this day.

EVERY MEMBER OF THE BAHÁ'I FAITH IS AN INDIVIDUAL AND PRACTICE MAY VARY.

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