

WHEN
YOUR PATIENT IS A
BAHÁ'Í



Approved by the National Spiritual
Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand
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to the Bahá'í Medical Association of Canada

WHEN YOUR PATIENT IS A BAHÁ'Í

This pamphlet has been produced in the hope that it will be useful to health-care professionals in the treatment of any Bahá'í patients who may seek their assistance. The Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith make it clear that, when ill, Bahá'ís must refer to competent, conscientious physicians, and then follow the advice given them. However, healing is seen to consist of both material and spiritual processes, both being essential and complementary; the Bahá'í patient will therefore also use such means as prayer and meditation to assist the healing process.

Prayer and Meditation:

Bahá'ís are required to pray and meditate on a daily basis. They believe that prayer will assist in healing, but that it is not to be used as the exclusive means of curing physical ailments - the assistance of a "competent physician" must also be sought. There are special prayers for healing but there is no set form of meditation - this is left entirely to the individual.

Alcohol and Drugs:

The consumption of alcohol, intoxicants and habit-forming drugs is prohibited unless prescribed by a qualified physician. When used for other than medical purposes these drugs are thought to interfere with spiritual well-being as well as posing a threat to physical health.

Smoking:

Bahá'ís are strongly encouraged not to smoke tobacco; its use should be subject to considerations of courtesy for the rights of others and the well-being of their own bodies.

Diet:

There are no dietary restrictions in the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'ís recognize the vital importance of diet and nutrition in promoting health and preventing illness. They are encouraged to be moderate in what they eat. Furthermore, they understand that current knowledge of the role of nutrition in preserving health and treating illness is still incomplete.

Fasting:

Each year from March 2nd to March 20th, Bahá'ís 15 years of age and older abstain from food and drink between sunrise and sunset. The purpose of the fast is spiritual - a symbolic reminder of the ease with which we fulfill physical desires but may, perhaps, neglect our spiritual growth and development. Exemption from fasting is allowed for those who are over 70, or who are engaged in heavy labour, are ill, pregnant, nursing or menstruating. Taking prescribed medication during the fast is permitted.

Marriage:

Bahá'ís view marriage as a divine institution, a spiritual as well as a physical partnership which constitutes the family unit - itself the foundation of human society. In addition, the Bahá'í Faith upholds the principle of the equality of men and women, both within families and in society as a whole. Bahá'ís endeavour to apply this principle both in their personal activities and in their marital relationships. Domestic violence is condemned, and when it exists Bahá'ís who are victims are urged to seek professional aid and legal protection. If a Bahá'í is the perpetrator of domestic violence he or she is urged to abide by civil law and to seek appropriate professional and spiritual assistance to remedy their problem.

In view of the sacred nature of marriage in the Bahá'í Faith, divorce is strongly discouraged and only resorted to in exceptional circumstances where intense and irreconcilable antipathy exists between the partners. Before divorce is granted by a Bahá'í Assembly the husband and wife must undergo a year of waiting, during which they live in separate residences, refrain from sexual intercourse, and are required to make serious attempts at reconciling their differences. Note that sexual activity outside of marriage is proscribed.

Childbearing, Family Planning and Abortion:

In addition to its purpose of improving the spiritual life of husband and wife, Bahá'ís understand the purpose of marriage to also include the perpetuation of the human race; thus the rearing of children is an important responsibility. Each couple may decide on the size of their family and are free to choose a method of contraception. The intra-uterine contraception device, because of its abortifacient potential, is unlikely to be chosen because Bahá'ís believe that the soul becomes associated with the body at conception and the deliberate taking of human life is generally not permitted. The Bahá'í Writings clearly state that abortion merely to prevent the birth of an unwanted child is forbidden. At the present time, the Bahá'í institutions do not legislate on the issue of abortion and it is left to the individuals concerned to decide on the best course of action. Such a decision would be based on consultation with all concerned, including the doctor(s), and would take into account the mother's physical and emotional health and the Bahá'í teachings on the nature of the soul and the sanctity of human life.

Operations that render either partner permanently sterile are not permitted unless recommended for the health of the individual involved, by the best medical advice available.

Couples having difficulty conceiving can use artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization provided that the egg of the wife is fertilized by the sperm of the husband.

Circumcision:

Bahá'ís are not advised on a particular course of action in respect to circumcision of males; circumcision of females is considered mutilation.

Prolonging Life:

The Bahá'í Writings do not advise about withholding or removing life support in disabling or terminal illness where intervention prolongs life. This decision is made by family members after careful consultation with appropriate health care professionals, and with due regard to the Bahá'í teachings on the nature of the soul and the sanctity of human life. It is also left to the conscience of the individual whether or not to subscribe to a "living will". Bahá'ís are counselled not to take their own life for any reason.

Death:

Bahá'ís believe that the soul is eternal and that even after death the physical body should be treated with respect. Embalming and cremation are prohibited for Bahá'ís unless required by law. The body is to be buried within one hour's journey from the place of death, and as soon as possible after death.

Donations of Organs and Blood:

Organ donation is allowed. Bodies may be donated for research but must be treated with respect and eventually buried within one hour's journey from the place of death. Bahá'ís can donate blood and receive blood transfusions.

Support for Bahá'ís:

There is no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í community is governed locally and nationally by elected councils called Spiritual Assemblies. These Assemblies are responsible for overseeing the affairs of the community in their jurisdiction and, in particular, serving the Bahá'ís in their area. Spiritual Assemblies officiate at Bahá'í marriages and funerals. They can also provide counseling services and support.

General Information about the Bahá'í Faith:

The Bahá'í Faith is the youngest of the world's independent religions. Its Prophet/Founder, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), is regarded by Bahá'ís as the most recent in a line of Messengers from God to all people. The central theme of Bahá'u'lláh's message is that humanity shares a biological and a spiritual unity. Humanity is viewed as a single family and realisation of the unity of humankind is viewed as the next step in its collective evolution. According to the 1992 Britannica Book of the Year, the Bahá'í Faith is the second most geographically widespread religion after Christianity and is established in over 200 countries. There are over 6 million Bahá'ís in the world, with some 4,000 living in New Zealand.

Who to Contact:

The phone number of the nearest Spiritual Assembly can be found in the telephone book or you may contact the

Bahá'í National Centre

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Henderson
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