

10 Death and dying customs

1 Read the text quickly and answer the questions below.

- 1 Who is this information for?
 - a patients
 - b healthcare professionals
 - c religious leaders
- 2 What is the writer's intention?
 - a to describe the process of dying and death
 - b to help people from different religions deal with grief
 - c to explain how different religions view dying and death

2 Read the text again. Decide whether each statement relates to Buddhism, Islam, or Judaism, and write *B, I, or J*. There may be more than one answer.

- 1 The dying person should be kept quiet and calm. _____
- 2 The dying person should not be left alone. _____
- 3 The body is washed by family members. _____
- 4 Any open wounds should be covered. _____
- 5 Burial should take place within 24 hours. _____
- 6 Cremation is not acceptable. _____
- 7 Burial or cremation are acceptable. _____

Death and dying customs

Death is a cultural as well as a biological event. It is important for you to be aware of the cultural and religious beliefs and customs of your dying patients and their families. These guidelines will help you to respond in an appropriate way in order to provide a culturally-aware service.

ISLAM

When a Muslim dies in hospital, the family may experience a great deal of anxiety if they feel that healthcare staff are unfamiliar with Muslim traditions. Firstly, it is important to put on some gloves so that you do not touch the body directly. The face of the person who has died should be turned towards Mecca. Straighten the arms and legs and close the mouth and eyes. After death, the body is washed by family members of the same sex and is wrapped in white linen cloth. According to Islamic tradition, a dead person should be buried as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours. A Muslim is always buried, never cremated. Post-mortem examinations are discouraged, unless they are required by law.

BUDDHISM

According to Buddhist beliefs, in death the consciousness departs from one life and begins the journey into another new life. For Buddhists, death is a process in which the consciousness gradually separates from the body. This can take up to three days, which is when death occurs. It is very important to provide as much peace and quiet for the dying person as possible. The more composed and calm the mind is at death, the greater the opportunity for a better rebirth. Immediately following signs of physical death, Buddhists believe that it is best to keep the body in a peaceful state. Traditionally, the body is taken to the home, and for a period of three days or so prayers are said and the body is not touched. The deceased may be cremated or buried, depending on the wishes of the family. Generally speaking, post-mortems are acceptable as the body is considered less important after death.

JUDAISM

By religious law, someone should stay with the dying person so that the soul does not feel alone. The body should also not be left alone after death. It is important to leave in place any catheters, drains, and tubes, as the fluid in them is considered to be part of the body, and must be buried with it. Cover them with gauze or bandages. Any wound dressings that have body fluids on them must also be left on the body. Any incisions or cuts must be covered. The body is prepared for burial as soon as possible after death, preferably within 24 hours. The body is prepared by members of the *chevra kaddisha*, or burial society, and the body is covered with a sheet. Post-mortem examinations are discouraged, unless they are required by law.

Taken from:

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