

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PROVIDING SERVICES TO MUSLIM PEOPLE

FOREWORD

Islam is at the core of the culture of many migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Bosnia, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Fiji and Africa as well as for many born in Australia..

This guide is aimed at increasing understanding as well as addressing issues commonly encountered in providing services to Muslims. The guide will be a valuable resource to all who are concerned with the medical, social and welfare needs of Muslim people.

While this guide provides a strong base for service providers to begin to understand issues concerning Muslims, it should be remembered that Muslim people cannot be regarded as a homogeneous group. As Islam places the onus of practising religion on the individual, people identifying as Muslims may hold to a wide range of different interpretations of the beliefs and practices. Professionals are encouraged to always discuss and clarify issues as they relate specifically to each individual in order to ensure that the most appropriate service is provided for that person.

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INTRODUCTION

Muslim people have a long history in Australia. Visits to the shores of northern Australia by Indonesian fishermen and traders pre-date the arrival of Captain Cook, and the Afghans played an essential role in opening up the Outback through the late 1800's. The first Masjid (Mosque) in South Australia was built in Little Gilbert Street in 1889. It is the oldest mosque in Australia and is now a heritage listed National Trust site.

By the middle of the twentieth century, Muslims from over seventy countries had settled in Australia. According to the 2001 census 7,478 people in South Australia identified as Muslims. It is estimated that by 2006 this figure had grown to approximately 20,000.

Muslims in Australia are a diverse group. Approximately

- 40% are Australian born
- 28% were born in the Middle East and North Africa
- 16% were born in Asia
- 9% were born in Europe
- 4% were born in sub-Saharan Africa
- 3% were born in Oceania

While almost all service providers can expect to encounter Muslim people, Islam is poorly understood in Australia. To live in a country where their religion is not well understood and is sometimes ridiculed may lead some Muslims to defer seeking help from services until their problems reach an advanced stage. These difficulties can be further exacerbated if the person has limited English as may be the case with some newly arrived groups or older generation Muslims.

Islam is a universal religion with followers from all nationalities of the world. Islam places the onus of practising on the individual and people from different ethnicities will practice customs differently. It is important to differentiate between ethnic customs and Islamic traditions. Discussions with the individual and/or relatives will therefore be essential to maintain the individual approach vital to effective care.

The information contained in this booklet is of a general nature. For more information on a particular subject please refer to one of the agencies listed in Appendix 2.

Please note: The preservation of life overrides all guidelines presented in this publication. Islam allows exceptions to rules in emergencies which are life threatening.

SECTION ONE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT ISLAM

A Muslim is a person who strives to organise his or her life according to the teachings of Islam. Islam literally means “Submission to the Will of Allah (God)” and derives from a word meaning “peace”. Muslims are guided by the Holy Qur'an (the words of Allah) and the Sunnah (the practices of the Prophet Muhammad – *Allah bless him and send him peace*).

THE PROPHET

While the Prophet Muhammad (*Allah bless him and send him peace*) is not considered to be divine, (he referred to himself as “nothing but Allah's slave”), he is deeply loved by all Muslims. As a sign of respect committed Muslims may repeat the words “salla'Llahu alayhi wa-sallam” (*Allah bless him and send him peace*) whenever his name is spoken.

The Prophet Muhammad (*Allah bless him and send him peace*) is considered to be the final link in a chain of prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus (*Peace be upon them*). He was born in Mecca in 570 CE. Orphaned at the age of 6 years he did not go to school or learn to read or write. As a young man he was known for his honesty, piety, fair dealing and common-sense and was given the nickname 'Al-Amin' meaning “Trustworthy”. As an adult he frequently went to a cave in the mountains where he meditated for days at a time. On one of these occasions, when he was approximately 40 years old, the Archangel Gabriel appeared and began to reveal to him the verses of the Qur'an.

THE QUR'AN

The Holy Qur'an is recognised by Muslims to be the last revelation from God to mankind before the end of the world. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (*Allah bless him and send him peace*) over a period of 23 years through the Archangel Gabriel. Being unable to write, the Prophet memorised the verses and repeated them to scribes who recorded them word for word. The Qur'an is believed to be the Word of Allah exactly as the Prophet received it. It is believed to contain nothing but the direct revelations of Allah with no influence from the Prophet himself. The Qur'an contains guidelines on issues ranging from social welfare to politics and economics and provides a complete ethic for living a wholesome life.

THE SUNNAH

The Sunnah is the sayings, attitudes and practices of the Prophet. It is the practical application of faith which Muslims must endeavour to follow. Muslims consider the Prophet to have been a perfect model of how Allah wants human beings to live and thousands of his actions and sayings were recorded.

THE KAABAH

The Kaabah (House of God) is a cuboid structure in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Kaabah has special significance for Muslims as they believe that the Prophet Adam built the first shrine for the worship of God on that spot. The Kaabah was later reconstructed by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael on the same site. Muslims do not worship the Kaabah and worship only Allah, but they all face the Kaabah to pray. In Australia the direction for prayer is west-north-west.

ARTICLES OF ISLAMIC FAITH

Islam, as outlined in the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah, consists of six articles of faith and five fundamental pillars. A Muslim believes in Allah (God Almighty), the Angels of God, the Prophets of God, the Books of God, (The Psalms, the Torah, the Gospel and the last of all divine revelations,

the Holy Qur'an), the Hereafter and Divine Decree (that is, the belief that what is good and what is evil has been predetermined by God).

FUNDAMENTAL PILLARS OF ISLAM

The five pillars which form the framework of a Muslim's life are

1. The Declaration of Faith (Shahadah)
2. The Five Daily Obligatory Prayers (Salaat)
3. The Annual Obligatory Alms for the needy (Zakat)
4. Fasting during Ramadan (Sawm)
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)

1) Declaration of Faith (Shahadah)

Muslims enter the faith by making a verbal declaration that there is no-one worthy of worship except Allah, and that Muhammad (*Allah bless him and send him peace*) is His true messenger. These statements are also used in the daily calls to prayer, at the birth of a new baby, on waking, before going to sleep, and, if possible, are the last words in the ears of a dying person.

2) Five Daily Obligatory Prayers (Salaat)

Prayer is a purification outwardly and inwardly. Muslims are required to pray five times a day within specific time periods.

- Fajr - between first light and sunrise
- Dhuhr - between noon and mid-afternoon
- Asr - between mid-afternoon and sunset
- Maghrib - just after sunset
- Isha - between dusk and dawn

Before praying Muslims must purify themselves physically and mentally by performing a brief ablution known as wudhu (see Section 2 for more details). Each prayer takes approximately ten minutes and consists of fixed sets of movements which include positions of standing, bowing, prostrating and sitting in worship of Allah. The Arabic language is used for all prayers

The Friday midday gathering for prayers at the Masjid is considered to be compulsory for males although females may also attend. As well as the prayers, a sermon (Khutbah) is delivered.

Muslims are encouraged to perform voluntary prayers in addition to the compulsory ones. Supplications can be made at any time of the day or night in any language.

3) Annual Obligatory Alms for the Needy (Zakat)

Zakat literally means purification and growth and refers specifically to the duty to donate an annual fixed minimal percentage of one's accumulated wealth to needy people each year. This expectation is only placed upon Muslims whose surplus wealth exceeds a prescribed amount and has been in his or her possession for at least one calendar year.

4) Fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm)

Ramadan is the holiest month in the Muslim calendar as it is believed to be when the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (*Allah bless him and send him peace*). During this period Muslims increase their religious practices and abstain from food and drink from first light until sunset. Fasting is considered to purify the body and soul, teach self-discipline and encourage compassion for those who are less fortunate.

Fasting is compulsory for all healthy Muslims once they have reached puberty. Exemptions are made for people whose health may be compromised by fasting. This includes children, people who

are suffering from physical or mental illness, travellers, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Women are excluded from fasting during menstruation and postnatal bleeding. In some cases the missed fasts must be made up for later.

5) Pilgrimage to Mecca

Every Muslim who is physically and financially able is required to make the pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. The great pilgrimage is performed during the 12th month of the Islamic calendar.

FESTIVALS

In Islam there are two major festivals.

1. Eid-ul-Fitr which marks the completion of the fasting month of Ramadan.
2. Eid-ul-Adha which occurs during the pilgrimage to Mecca. This takes place two months and ten days after Eid-ul-Fitr. It commemorates the obedience of the Prophet Abraham (*Peace be upon him*) when called upon to sacrifice his son Ishmael. At the last moment Allah substituted a lamb in Ishmael's place. Muslims all over the world commemorate this event by sacrificing an animal (i.e. a sheep, goat or cow) and sharing the meat with family, friends and the needy.

During both of these festivals special Eid prayers are held at the Masjid. The day is spent giving thanks and glorifying Allah and visiting relatives and friends.

THE ISLAMIC CALAENDAR

The Islamic Calendar is based on the lunar system which differs significantly from the Gregorian or solar calendar commonly used in the West. As with the Gregorian calendar there are twelve months named Muharram, Safar, Rabi-al-Awal, Rabi-al-Akhir, Jamadi-al-Awal, Jamadi-al-Akhir, Rajab, Shaaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhul Qadah and Dhul Hijjah.

JIHAD

A popular misconception is that the word "jihad" means holy war. In fact the Arabic term for holy war is "harb muqadasa" and does not appear anywhere in the Qur'an. The word "jihad" literally means "striving to achieve something honourable". Forms of jihad are 1) personal (the battle to overcome one's anger, desires and hatred), 2) social (striving to end social injustice), 3) spiritual (reflecting on signs of the Creator) and 4) political (fighting in self-defence). Warfare may only be conducted under strict conditions and there are many laws that constrain the conduct of parties at war. These include the protection of innocent civilians and the preservation of civilian infrastructure and the environment, and the prohibition against torture or acts of terrorism.

SECTION TWO

There are a number of Islamic beliefs and practices an understanding of which will assist in the provision of services to Muslim people.

PRAYER

Muslim people are required to pray five times a day within specific time periods. A Muslim may pray almost anywhere: at home, in offices, hospitals or workplaces. Prayer requires a clean quiet place facing the direction of the Kaabah in Mecca. Muslims should not be interrupted while they are praying. If possible a clean, quiet room devoid of religious icons should be made available for Muslims to pray privately during the specified times. Washing facilities should also be made available so that ablutions may be performed before prayer.

It is helpful if service providers within their work setting know the direction of Mecca (roughly west-north-west in Australia) and are able to help Muslims to locate that direction when they need to pray.

CLEANLINESS AND PURIFICATION

Cleanliness is an important part of the Islamic faith. Muslims should not pray or hold a copy of the Arabic Qur'an without first purifying themselves physically and mentally. There are three types of washing or purification rituals that may be used.

Wudhu is the ablution Muslims perform to purify themselves in preparation for prayer. It involves the washing of the hands, mouth, nostrils, face, forearms, wiping the head, ears, and neck, and washing the feet with clean water. Once one has completed *wudhu*, one remains in a state of purification until that state is broken. *Wudhu* is considered to be broken if a person loses consciousness through sleep or any other cause, if physical contact occurs between man and woman where sexual pleasure is either intended or obtained, or when there is any discharge of body fluids such as blood, semen, urine, faeces, wind or vomit. For the latter reason, women who are menstruating or have recently given birth are excused from prayer and fasting during these times.

Ghusl is the washing of the entire body in running water in accordance with the Sunnah of the Prophet. It must be performed when embracing Islam, after sexual intercourse or seminal emission, at the end of menstruation, after childbirth, and after contact with dead bodies or before burial.

Tayammum is an ablution that may be performed when water is not available or someone is too ill to perform *wudhu*. It involves touching a stone or clean dust with the hands and moving the hands over the face and forearms.

Washing facilities should be made available to all Muslims. For patients in hospital or who are bedridden, special care should be taken with cleanliness, particularly with any form of discharge. A small container of water should be made available for patients to cleanse themselves, especially after a bed pan is used.

FOOD

In Islam specific foods are defined as being either *halal* (allowed) or *haram* (forbidden). Only *halal* food should be served to Muslims. *Halal* food is readily available in Adelaide. The Muslim Women's Association (8212 8000) can provide a current list of providers. When *halal* meats are not available, Muslims should be offered seafood, eggs, dairy products, fruit and vegetables. Care should be taken to prevent cross-contamination with *non-halal* foods (i.e. by using the same utensils for both or by using *non-halal* animal products in the preparation process).

Meats such as chicken, beef, lamb, and goat are considered to be *halal* and are allowed, provided

that they have been slaughtered according to Islamic rites. Animals must be slaughtered in a prescribed manner (a cut to the jugular vein with a very sharp knife) which is believed to be the kindest method allowing the animal to lose consciousness immediately. The name of God is proclaimed at the time of death to call attention to the fact that life is not being taken thoughtlessly but with the permission of God for food. Animals which have died by any other means are prohibited. Pig meat and all pork products are strictly forbidden. Animals that use their claws or teeth to kill their victims are also forbidden. Products derived from animals that are not *halal* (e.g. lard and gelatine) are also prohibited.

Fruit, vegetables, seafood and dairy products are considered to be *halal* provided they are not contaminated during the preparation process by *non-halal* foods.

Water is traditionally taken at mealtimes and fresh water and a drinking glass should be made available with meals. Depending on ethnic background some Muslim people may prefer to eat from separate plates with their fingers rather than from one plate with a knife and fork. Eating preferences can be clarified through discussions with the individual.

Muslims are advised not to eat to capacity and to always share food. Small amounts of uneaten food are therefore not necessarily anything to worry about although large amounts of untouched food may indicate the existence of a problem.

Hand washing before and after meals is considered particularly important and facilities should be made available. The left hand is used for cleaning; food and drink should therefore be served and received with the right hand.

ALCOHOL

Islam prohibits the use of all alcoholic drinks and intoxicants.

Because many medications contain alcohol as a base preservative, doctors and pharmacists should discuss with a patient requiring medication the availability of alternative medications that do not include alcohol. When medication is essential, and no alternative is available, a medication containing alcohol would be permitted.

FASTING

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. During this period Muslims who are fasting abstain from all food, drinks and smoking from dawn until sunset. As the Islamic calendar is lunar, Ramadan falls 10 days earlier each year. Over the period of a lifetime Ramadan will therefore occur in each of the four seasons. To find out when Ramadan is due in any given year contact the Muslim Women's Association or the local Masjid (mosque).

Fasting is compulsory for all healthy Muslims once they have reached puberty. Besides fasting in Ramadan, some Muslims also keep optional fasts. Fasting is a purification inwardly and outwardly.

Exemptions to fasting.

Women are excluded from fasting during menstruation and post-natal bleeding. Other exemptions are made for people whose health may be compromised by fasting, including,

- young children,
- people with mental impairments who are not able to comprehend the nature and purpose of the fast.
- people who are old or frail
- people who are acutely unwell or have a chronic illness

- women who are pregnant or breastfeeding
- people who are travelling long distances

Islam puts the onus on the sick person to decide whether or not to fast, having first consulted a Muslim physician. When fasting may be considered detrimental to a Muslim's health he or she should be provided with the opportunity to discuss the issue with a Muslim physician. The names and telephone numbers of practising Muslim physicians may be obtained by contacting the Muslim Women's Association.

Additional care for people with chronic health conditions

After consulting with a physician, some people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy or hypertension may decide to participate in the fast. Additional care for these individuals should be considered and may include a review just before Ramadan to ensure they are in good health prior to fasting, a discussion of plans for maintaining health during the fast, and a review just after Ramadan to discuss whether to return to the previous regimen or continue with the new one if that proved more suitable.

Medication during fasting

To allow anything to pass through the mouth into the stomach is considered to break the fast. The use of oral medication is therefore prohibited during the hours of fasting. Doctors will need to discuss with patients the importance of any oral medication prescribed and the possible implications of not taking the medication during daylight hours. Wherever possible, alternative options should be considered including changes of dosage times or switching to longer-acting medication to accommodate the fast. If it is strictly necessary for medication to be taken during daylight hours (e.g. to preserve life) the reasons for this should be explained to the patient and an exemption from fasting considered.

Alternatives to fasting

People who are unable to fast due to a temporary or acute medical illness can make up for the missed fast at a later time when they return to good health. People who are unable to fast due to chronic illness may substitute fasting with providing food for the needy.

MODESTY

Although one may find varying degrees of adherence to a dress code depending on the individual, Muslims are expected to always dress in a dignified and modest manner. The Qur'an specifies what is considered to be modest dress and also specifies the family members in front of whom the dress code may be relaxed. Muslims can wear a wide variety of clothing provided that their "awrah" is covered. A female is required to be covered from her head to ankles. Only her face and hands may be exposed. A male is required to cover himself from his umbilicus to his knees. It is important to note that modesty is as much about one's attitude and behaviour as about what one wears.

Great importance is placed by Muslims on modesty. Physical contact between unmarried or unrelated members of the opposite sex is strongly discouraged although it is permitted for medical treatment. Most Muslims will prefer to see a same-sex clinician especially if the consultation requires an examination of the genital region. Personal care such as bathing or dressing in a nursing home or hospital should be carried out wherever possible by a worker of the same gender as the patient. Medical examination techniques should be modified where possible so that, without inhibiting the medical procedures, as little of the patient is exposed as possible. Additional screens or drapes to cover exposed areas of the body should be used where possible.

The use of a same-sex interpreter for any appointments will also significantly increase comfort.

WOMEN IN ISLAM

Islam is often misunderstood by people who believe that it degrades and oppresses women. It is important to differentiate between practices which come from Islam and practices that come from specific cultures or patriarchal interpretations of teachings. According to the Qur'an there is equality between men and women. Men and women should complement, rather than compete, with each other.

The Muslim woman has the right to choose her own husband. Both are considered equal partners in life. Each has the right to kind and just treatment from the other. The wife has the right to participate in any decision, domestic or political. She can carry her own surname and does not lose any rights after marriage. She has full rights to earn an income, and possess and dispose of property in her own right.

While women have the right to seek employment, Islam considers the raising of children in a careful and upright manner to be vital. The role of the housewife and mother is therefore encouraged and greatly respected. However, Islam also places great importance on the education of women, so much so that the Prophet Muhammed (*May Allah bless him and grant him peace*) declared that "It is compulsory for men and women to learn from the cradle to the grave".

FAMILY

In Islam, the family is viewed as a divinely inspired institution with the sacred union of marriage at its core. Intimate relationships between men and women are only permitted within the confines of marriage. Homosexuality or any form of extra marital relations is viewed as a threat to the family structure and ultimately to the foundation of society.

The family unit is regarded as the cornerstone of a healthy and balanced society. It consists of both the nuclear and extended family. The extended family plays an important role by providing a continuous link between generations, a broad-based support for all within the family structure and extra care for the young and elderly. Muslims are expected to extend their utmost help to other family members and relatives in need.

Divorce is permitted under Islamic law but only as a last resort; where irreconcilable differences exist and after all attempts at reconciliation have failed. It is considered to be a grave sin to divorce without significant reasons. The Prophet Muhammad (*Allah bless him and send him peace*) said: "Of all things which have been permitted, divorce is the most hated by Almighty God".

Pre-marital sex is strictly prohibited in Islam. In order to avoid placing people at the risk of temptation or arousing suspicion, males and females who have reached puberty are discouraged from mixing freely unless they are family members. Behaviour or clothing that may arouse desire or indicate immodesty are also discouraged.

Islam preserves the family unit by providing basic rules as to the conduct of each family member. The rights of the young and the old are well defined. Husbands and wives have definite responsibilities which are complementary. The rights of women are considered to be equal to those of men, although not necessarily identical. Husbands and wives are expected to demonstrate mutual respect at all times.

The man is the head of household and is considered to be responsible for providing economically for his family, irrespective of whether his wife is earning an income or not. Unemployment therefore has the potential to have a significant impact on the psychological state of a man who may feel unable to fulfil the role appointed to him. This can be particularly problematic in refugee

populations where men may experience difficulties in finding secure employment.

CHILDREN

In Islam babies are not regarded as 'accidents' but as gifts from God. To be able to have children is to be considered a great blessing. Children are considered to have rights that precede their conception. These include the expectation that they will be born through a legitimate union with full knowledge of their parentage. Each child is also considered to have the right to a good name, to be breastfed, educated, and to be raised in a loving and caring environment.

The parent-child relationship is also considered to be complementary. Each is required by God to love, obey and respect each other. Men and women are required to demonstrate benevolence towards their parents and care for them as they age. Children are considered to have an inalienable right to life and equal chances in life. No discrimination of any kind is permitted.

CARE OF ELDERLY

In Muslim culture, the elderly are deeply respected on account of their age and life experiences. They are considered to be valuable members of the family, providing a wealth of knowledge, reinforcing family values and contributing to the raising of children. Whether they live together with their children or separately, elderly parents are usually consulted in all decisions.

In Muslim families there is an obligation to care for the elderly and attend to their personal needs. It is considered a gift from Allah to have the opportunity to tend to the needs of one's parents in their later years. It is considered disrespectful to draw attention to the care and support they are provided with, or to make the elderly feel guilty or a burden in any way. Muslims do not regard it as acceptable to relegate the care of their elderly to strangers. If it is not possible for care to be provided for the elderly within the home, respite care and nursing home facilities may be utilised as a last resort.

Caregivers need to be especially sensitive to the religious needs of the Muslim aged. Prayer is very important to Muslims, even more so for the elderly. Facilities for ablution and a clean quiet space for prayer should be provided. Care involving physical contact such as bathing or dressing should be done by workers of the same gender. All meals should be *halal*.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Although sex is considered to be a legitimate and enjoyable activity within marriage, sex should remain a very private matter between husband and wife. Muslims may be reluctant to discuss matters relating to sexual health with anyone outside of this relationship. Where possible healthcare professionals assisting Muslims with matters relating to reproduction or sexual health should be of the same gender as the patient and be particularly sensitive to matters of privacy and decency.

CHILDBIRTH

During confinement and childbirth it is preferable for Muslim women to be cared for by females. The position of delivery should be discussed and the woman given the choice. There is no reason, except for modesty or embarrassment, that her husband should not be present during childbirth. However, where possible, only female staff should be present during childbirth and exposure of the woman should be kept to a minimum.

NEWBORNS

It is important for a newborn Muslim child to have a call to prayer whispered into each ear soon after birth. Some prefer this to be done immediately after birth so that 'God' is the first word that the baby hears. Parents should be offered the opportunity to perform the call to prayer as soon as possible after the birth. The entire ceremony only takes a few minutes and may be performed by the

parents or any other person learned in Islam. Some parents may prefer the opportunity to perform this rite in private.

After delivery, the placenta (which is considered to be part of the baby) should be offered to the parents for disposal and burial in accordance with Islam.

Breastfeeding is encouraged in Islamic teachings although privacy may be a barrier for some new mothers in a hospital setting. Muslim belief demands that women should not expose certain body areas, including the breasts, to anyone other than her husband. To facilitate the establishment of breast feeding, a new Muslim mother should be provided with as much privacy as possible.

Male circumcision is sanctioned by Islamic religious law. Some Muslims may wish to circumcise their male babies while still in hospital; others may choose to postpone this until a later time. Facilities should be provided for male circumcision if required. **Female circumcision is not an Islamic practice.**

ASSISTED REPRODUCTION

In-vitro fertilisation and artificial insemination are permitted in Islam provided that the husband's sperm and wife's eggs are used. The use of donor sperm or eggs is prohibited. Any form of embryo experimentation is strictly forbidden in Islam.

CONTRACEPTION

Muslim opinion with regard to contraception is divided. Some Muslims believe that contraception is expressly prohibited whereas others argue that some forms of contraception are allowed but discouraged.

The rhythm method and coitus interruptus are considered by many to be acceptable forms of contraception, although the husband must first have the permission of his wife to practise these. Reversible forms of contraception (such as the use of condoms or the pill) may be considered acceptable although undesirable. Irreversible forms of contraception such as tubal ligation and vasectomies are not permitted unless pregnancy is contra-indicated on medical grounds.

INTRAUTERINE DEATH

A foetus after the age of one hundred and twenty days is regarded to be 'alive'. A miscarriage or an intrauterine death occurring after this period requires a burial. The foetus is given a name before burial. Arrangements should be made to allow the parents to provide a proper burial if a foetus has passed 120 days of gestation.

ABORTION

Abortion is not permitted in Islam unless there are very strong medical reasons. The first four months of pregnancy are recognised as a critical period for the development of the foetus. Abortion during this period for strong medical reasons is allowed. However, after the fourth month has passed, the foetus is regarded as 'alive'. The termination of pregnancy after this stage is regarded as murder. If pregnancy constitutes a serious threat to the life of the mother, then an abortion is permissible irrespective of the period of gestation.

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

Foster care, especially of orphans, is encouraged in Islam provided that:

- the child is allowed to retain the name of the biological parents. If the name is unknown, he/she must be called a brother/sister in faith.
- the wealth of the child, if any, especially in the case of orphans is kept separately and given to

the child when he/she reaches adulthood;

- on attaining puberty, the adopted person assumes the status of a stranger in the house with all of the attendant implications for behaviour.
- marriage may take place between a foster person and a member of the family of the foster family, provided that the foster mother did not breast-feed both persons concerned

Adoption practices that involve changing the surname of the child or the child losing all connection with his or her biological parents are not considered to be acceptable in Islam

MENTAL ILLNESS

Islam requires that a person with a mental illness is treated with compassion. A person diagnosed as having a mental illness is absolved from the obligatory requirements of Islam such as fasting and praying. The family is responsible, in the first instance, for a member who is mentally ill. If this is not possible, he or she becomes the responsibility of the state.

VISITING THE SICK

Following the Sunnah of the Prophet, Islam places strong emphasis on the virtues of visiting the sick. If his or her condition allows, a Muslim is usually happy to receive many visitors and a family member may wish to remain with the patient at all times. Family members are required to notify as many people as possible of the illness. It is also important for the family to recite the Qur'an or supplicate to Allah in front of the patient. If the patient is conscious he or she will be encouraged to utter the Declaration of Faith (Shahdah).

When in hospital, arrangements should be made where possible to accommodate family members who wish to stay with a Muslim patient. Privacy should be provided for family members to pray either with the patient or in a room nearby. Hospital staff should also anticipate the patient receiving many visitors.

If the patient is unconscious, access to a religious leader should be made available.

THE FINAL ILLNESS

It is important for family and friends to visit a person who is known to be dying, and a family member may wish to remain with the person at all times. During this time forgiveness may be sought for any wrongful action which may have deliberately or inadvertently been committed. Family members may offer hope to the dying person by reciting passages from the Qur'an or pray for the welfare of the person in the life to come, either in their presence or a room close by. Some relatives may attempt to conceal these practices so as to avoid embarrassment or offending staff.

Where possible arrangements should be made to accommodate family members who wish to stay with a Muslim patient all the time. Relatives should be invited to pray if they wish. Privacy should be provided for family members to pray either with the patient or in a room nearby (a chapel may be used provided no religious icons are present). Access to a religious leader should be made available during this time and may be arranged by the relatives or through contacting an agency listed in Appendix 2.

The daily prayers are an important aspect of life for a Muslim and the dying person will be encouraged to continue with their prayers for as long as they are able. They may also require assistance from relatives to perform the pre-requisite ablutions and purification rituals for prayer. If the person is conscious he or she will be encouraged to utter the Shahadah (Testimony of Faith). It is considered to be beneficial if the person recites these words as he or she breathes their last breath. However the most important thing is that the person dies in a state of belief, regardless of his or her last words.

If the person becomes bed-bound they will find maintaining their daily prayers easier if the bed is positioned in the direction of Mecca (west-north-west in Australia). If the patient is unconscious it is preferred that the face of the patient be turned to face Mecca. Washing facilities and a small container of water should be made readily available to facilitate purification. Special care should be taken with cleanliness, especially with any form of discharge.

DEATH

Muslims believe that life on earth is only one state of existence. Death marks a transition towards the next state, the afterlife. Death is seen as something preordained by God and not to be resisted or fought against. "Life is God's gift, and the length of one's life is His grant". Suicide and euthanasia are forbidden.

DUTIES AFTER DEATH

Muslims believe that the body after death feels pressure and pain many times more than that applied and that the soul remains close to the body until burial. Relatives may wish to remain with the body or in a room nearby to pray for the deceased. The body of the deceased should be covered at all times and handled as little as possible and, wherever possible, only by members of the same sex.

When a Muslim has died the eyes are gently closed, the face is turned towards Mecca (west-north-west in Australia) and the arms placed by their sides. The whole body including the face is covered. The body should not be washed by a stranger. Islamic washing (Ghusl) of the body is done before burial. If no relatives are available then the Al-Khalil Islamic and Arabic Centre should be contacted.

At the time of bereavement, the use of an interpreter should be offered to non-English speaking family members. Facilities should be provided to allow relatives to remain with the body or pray in a room nearby if desired.

Islam encourages that the person be buried as soon as possible after death, preferably on the same day. Cremation is forbidden. Adelaide's only Islamic funeral service and cemetery are provided through the Al-Khalil Islamic and Arabic Centre. They should be contacted as soon as possible if it is the family's desire to have an Islamic burial.

MOURNING

Although it is natural to feel sad following a death, Muslims believe that death is not the end but a transition into the afterlife. The usual publicly acknowledged period of mourning is for three days and nights although this is longer for a wife (especially if she is pregnant).

POST-MORTEM

Islamic belief holds that a deceased person is still able to perceive pain and that the deceased should be buried as soon as possible after death, preferably on the same day. Post-mortems are generally not allowed because it harms the body and delays burial. However, where there are unusual or suspicious circumstances and the law of the land requires a post-mortem examination, it can be conducted even though the procedure is likely to be very distressing for the family of the deceased.

Where a post-mortem is required, it should be conducted as promptly as possible. The Al Khalil Islamic and Arabic Centre should be contacted as there are specific guidelines to be followed. All internal organs must be replaced and wounds sutured before releasing the body for burial.

ORGAN TRANSPLANTS

Views regarding organ transplants are varied. Many oppose the transplanting of organs for the reasons stated above. Others consider the transplanting of various human organs to be acceptable in Islam. Where organ transplant is accepted certain conditions apply, namely;

- A live donor must not be at risk while donating (e.g. in the case blood or kidney donation)
- The donor and/or donor family's permission must be obtained. Organs should not be the outcome of compulsion, family embarrassment, or exploitation for financial or other reasons.
- No vital organ may be removed while the person is alive. In the case of heart transplants the donor must be clinically dead before the heart is removed.

Appendix 1

Summary of foods approved (Halal) and forbidden (Haram) by the Islamic faith

Food Type	Approved (Halal)	Forbidden (Haram)
Meat and Substitutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chicken, beef, lamb and goat slaughtered according to Islamic rites.• All seafood• Eggs cooked in water, butter, vegetable margarine or vegetable oil.• Dried beans and lentils, baked beans	Pork and all pig products (bacon, ham, salami etc.).
Dairy	Milk, yoghurt, cheese, ice cream made without animal fat (tofu ice cream, gelati or sherbet).	Ice cream made with animal fat
Fruit and Vegetables	All fruit or vegetable raw or cooked using water, vegetable fats or butter	Any fruit or vegetable fried or roasted in lard or dripping
Bread and Cereals	All breakfast cereals. Bread, cakes and biscuits prepared without animal fat other than butter (read labels). Rice and pasta.	
Fats and Oils	Butter, vegetable margarine, olive oil, peanut oil, vegetable oils.	Lard, dripping, suet, other animal fat (except butter) and any other foods prepared using these products
Beverages	Tea, coffee, water, fruit juice, soft drinks, mineral and soda water, cordials.	Alcohol and foods cooked with alcohol, alcohol e.g. trifles, puddings, sauces
Soups	Any made without pork, ham or animal fats	Soups containing pork, ham or animal fat (including stocks made using these product)
Desserts	Fruit-based desserts, custards, tofu ice creams, gelati or sherbet, puddings made with butter or vegetable margarine, egg dishes, rice dishes.	Any dessert containing or prepared using alcohol, animal fats or other listed forbidden foods
Miscellaneous	Coconut milk, Spices, including chilli,curry powder. Pickles, chutneys etc.	Gelatine (pork product) Vanilla essence (alcohol base)

For further information email:info@halalhelpline.org or visit the website on www.halalhelpline.org

CONTACT DETAILS

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T: 08 8212 0800 M: 0439 002 305

The Al Khalil Islamic and Arabic Centre

cnr Torrens Rd and Audley St Woodville North 5012
T: 08 8268 2257

STTARS (The Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service)

12 Hawker St Bowden 5007
T: 08 8346 5433

The Migrant Health Service

21 Market St Adelaide 5000
T: 08 8237 3900

The Migrant Resource Centre

59 King William St Adelaide 5000
T: 08 8217 9500

The Australian Refugee Association

304 Henley Beach Rd Underdale
T: 08 8354 2951

REFERENCES

The Practical Guide to Providing Services to Muslims is based on publications written and published by the Muslim Women's Association SA Inc and the Islamic Councils of Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

Additional sources were

WA Health.
Aziz Sheikh
Abdul Rahsid Gatrad
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