



GUIDELINES FOR
HINDU CHAPLAINS

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Guidelines for Hindu Chaplains

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Forward

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in the UK has been offering hospital chaplaincy service through its volunteers all over the UK. The Public Health England [1] has recognised that there is a need for faith-based chaplaincy service. VHP(UK) has produced this guidance based on the information provided by the Public Health England and the 'NHS Chaplaincy Guidelines' [2] to offer additional Hindu faith specific material to help the existing and future volunteers who are willing to do this noble task of helping patients and their families.

Introduction

The Public Health England's document '*Faith at end of life*' [1] states, "it has long been acknowledged that pain is not always only physical and can encompass psychological, social and spiritual dimensions. Accordingly, to ensure truly holistic and person-centred care at end of life, professionals and providers should ensure that any spiritual needs of the individuals they care for are addressed. Many people at the end of life do not wish to be separated from the communities in which they have lived; and for some, these communities will incorporate a spiritual element".

This guide aims to help Hindu faith chaplains to work with hospital staff to meet the spiritual needs of Hindu patients. Spirituality can be defined in many ways and is incorporated in a vast range of belief systems within Hinduism. A person's spiritual belief may lend itself to a particular practice and rituals at the end of life, particularly when associated with an established faith. Faith traditions have rituals and beliefs that influence healthcare choices, bring comfort and meaning, and can facilitate attaining peace at the time of death.

Every individual's spiritual needs and wishes are different. They may be affiliated to a faith or belief system, or may ascribe to an interpretation of a faith or belief system particular to their own culture and lifestyle.

Hinduism Background

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world with about 900 million Hindus worldwide. Unlike most other religions there is no single founder, no one sacred text, no commonly agreed set of teaching or unified code of conduct. It is not based on one single book or a set of dogmas; on the contrary, it allows a great deal of freedom of thought, faith and worship. Hinduism is not a single religious faith system because it does not insist on any fixed set of doctrines. There are a variety of religious sects or traditions in Hinduism. However, in spite of this diversity, there is a certain unity among all the various doctrines and schools of thought because their basic principles are based on the 'eternal laws of nature' which can be rightly defined as Sanatana (eternal) Dharma (laws of nature). Further information can be obtained from '*Explaining Hindu Dharma*' [3] which summarises that the common concepts accepted by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains include the belief in the eternal self (Atman) that transmigrates in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth governed by the law of Karma.

Care for people who are dying and what to do after death

This information has been collated following on from the guidance of Public Health England [1] and additional information has been provided about rituals to mark the end of life taken from 'Sixteen Sanskars in the Life of Hindu' [4]. In Hinduism, the journey of life is marked by sixteen sacraments known as 'Sanskars'. They mark key stages and changes in life and involve rituals which are explained in [4]. The sixteenth and the final Sanskar called 'Antyaishti' is performed after a person's death.

In Hinduism, death is seen as not only the end to the physical body, but a natural progression of the soul in to the next state of existence. The next step may be accepting another physical body (Punar Janam), or a state of permanent liberation (Moksha), to which many Hindu's aspire.

In Hindu belief a dying person's state of mind at death significantly influences rebirth. Therefore, the dying person and their family may take great care to create an atmosphere to remind them of their relationship with God and lead to an auspicious death. For example, a dying person may wish to have religious items around the bed to help prepare for their departure. Common items include sacred images of deities or saints, sacred flowers and garlands, rosary and prayer beads, Ganges (Hindus know it as Ganga) water and religious texts like the Gita.

Before death it may also be important to a Hindu person to be able to save those in need with articles of use, or food. These offerings can also be made to the temple or religious persons to fulfil the duty of giving to others. Wherever possible, professionals should help to accommodate these wishes.

Some female Hindus may request a female professional to look after their personal needs. Physical purity as well as spiritual purity is important and some may require the use of water for ablutions. As issues regarding urinary and bowel needs are not openly discussed by most Hindus, constipation can be a major silent illness that needs to be sensitively approached by professionals.

During the final stages, many relatives and family members may visit the patient to comfort, offer their respects and advise on the final sojourn. All parties may take this opportunity to ask forgiveness of any inadvertent offences. To accommodate this, Hindus may request flexibility around the standard rule of two visitors that exists in many establishments' visiting rules.

Hindu sacred texts describe that hearing is the last sense to be active before death. Great care is taken to avoid saying anything that will be disturbing for the dying person, even if they are unconscious. Emphasis is therefore placed on the recitation of prayers, devotional songs (bhajans) or the names of God. There may be soft chanting of mantras (taking the name of God), recitation of prayers or readings from sacred texts by family and visitors. These activities are to nurture a spiritual atmosphere and frame of mind. On the other hand, some patients may prefer time for silent prayer and meditation, especially in the early hours of the morning.

Shortly before death, both the sacred tulsi leaf and Ganges water may be administered to the dying person either by their family or a priest. Ideally this is done as close to death as possible.

Following death, family members may gather around the body to pay their respects, offer prayers, chant the name of God and recite the peace prayer (Shantih Paath). It is important at this time that the family is consulted to see if they wish to carry out last rites. Where the family is not available, it is important that professionals close the eyes of the deceased and straighten their limbs, ensuring that jewellery and religious objects are not removed and that the body is wrapped in a plain sheet without religious emblem.

Cremations are the norm among Hindus except for children (in some traditions under the age of 27 months and in others under the age of five years) where burials may be preferred. On the day of cremation, the body is usually returned to the home of the deceased for a few hours, allowing the priest to perform the final ceremony and friends and relatives to offer their respects. However, some families may prefer to have this done at the funeral director's or crematorium. In India, cremation normally takes place by sunset on the same day as death, and while this is not possible in Britain, Hindu cremations should be carried out as soon as possible.

Thirteen days of purification and mourning usually follow a death, though there is some variation in the length of this time according to region, traditions and family background. During this time there may be daily gatherings of family members, relatives and friends. After this period of mourning another ceremony is performed to end the process. Following this, the ashes are dispersed within one year of cremation. Many Hindus often travel to India to disperse the ashes in the holy rivers, though others prefer to do so into the local rivers in Britain.

Procedure and Protocol

Normally, a phone call will be made by a health professional (nurse or ward sister) looking after the patient to the VHP(UK) volunteer covering that geographical area. In some areas, VHP(UK) has provided their local contact name and telephone number to hospitals offering chaplaincy service. It is important that this contact detail is kept up to date and is backed up by an answering service if possible. VHP(UK) is working with NHS England (and the equivalent bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) to increase the availability of chaplaincy service for Hindu patients.

The VHP(UK) volunteer receiving the call must make sure that the patient's family members are comfortable with a visit from a Hindu chaplain. If possible, it would be good to talk to a member of the patient's family before making the visit.

Code of Conduct

UK Board of Healthcare Chaplains (UKBHC) [5] has set the professional standards of conduct expected of healthcare chaplains towards those in their care. It is written for professional chaplains. For volunteers offering the chaplaincy service, the following code of conduct is proposed:-

- be able to justify your practice.
- promote and safeguard the interests and wellbeing of patients;
- treat patients and their families with equal respect and dignity;
- respect the rights of individuals, belief groups and faith communities to hold their own values, traditions, beliefs and practices;
- act with integrity, sensitivity and understanding;
- develop and maintain your knowledge, skills and capabilities to practise safely, ethically, competently and legally;
- ensure that you are fit to practice and that those you are visiting are not at risk of harm because of your conduct, performance or health;
- comply with the policies and protocols of the hospital you are visiting;

Consoling a Patient or Patient's Family

Distress caused by physical ailment and the unknown future can cause fear, anxiety and stress in a patient and/or in their family. A Hindu chaplain can offer spiritual guidance which can help create an inner strength in people. A chaplain can explain the following main Hindu concepts about life and death:-

- § **Life does not end with death - Cycle of life and death - Sansara**
- § **The body perishes - The soul is eternal and immortal**
- § **Theory of Karma-As you sow so shall you reap-The law of cause and effect**
- § **Liberation from the cycle of birth/death- Moksha (Mukti in Sikhism and Nirvana in Buddhism)**

By laying some emphasis on the Hindu belief that the Atman (the inner core of one's being – the soul) is immortal which will continue on its journey, one can remove the fear that death is the end of everything. Selected prayers are suggested overleaf which can be recited with meanings.

Hindu Prayers

Selected Shlokas from Gita

अधश्चोर्ध्वं प्रसृतास्तस्य शाखा

गुणप्रवृद्धा विषयप्रवालाः।

अधश्च मूलान्यनुसन्ततानि

कर्मानुबन्धीनि मनुष्यलोके॥ 15.2॥

"Adhas chordhvam prasrtas tasya shakha

Guna-pravrddha vishaya pravaalaah

Adhas cha mulaanya anusantatani

Karma-nubandhini manushya-loke"

The branches of this tree (representing the different species of living beings) extend downward and upward, nourished by the three Gunas (positive, negative and neutral qualities of nature). The twigs are the objects of the senses. This tree also has roots going down, and these bind the soul in this world according to the actions performed.

देहिनोऽस्मिन्यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा।

तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिर्धीरस्तत्र न मुह्यति॥ 2.13॥

"Dehi no asmin yatha dehe kaumaram yauvanam jaraa

Tathaa deh-aantara-praptir dhiras tatra na muhyati"

Just as the Atma acquires a childhood body, a youth body, and an old age body during this life, similarly Atma acquires another body after death. The wise are not deluded by this.

अविनाशि तु तद्विद्धि येन सर्वमिदं ततम्।

विनाशमव्ययस्यास्य न कश्चित् कर्तुमर्हति॥ 2.17॥

"Avinaashi tu tad vidhi yena sarvam idam tatam

Vinasham avyayasy asya na kashchit kartum arhati"

Know That (Atma), by which all this (universe) is pervaded, to be indestructible. No one can destroy the indestructible (Atma).

अन्तवन्त इमे देहा नित्यस्योक्ताः शरीरिणः।
अनाशिनोऽप्रमेयस्य तस्माद्युध्यस्व भारत॥ 2.18॥

"Antvanta eme deha nityasy-oktah sharirinah

Anashino prameyasya tasmad yudhyasva bharat"

Physical bodies of the eternal, imperishable, and incomprehensible soul are perishable.

न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचि
न्नायं भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे॥ 2.20॥

"Na jayate mriyate va kadachin

Nayam bhutva bhavita va na bhuyah

Ajo nityah shashvato ayam purano

Na hanyate hanyamane sharire"

The Atma is neither born nor does it die at any time, nor having been it will cease to exist again. It is un-born, eternal, permanent, and everlasting. The Atma is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही॥ 2.22॥

"Vasansi Jeernani yatha vihaya

Navani grhnaati naro parani

Tatha sharirani vihaya jeernanya

Anyani sanyati navani dehee"

Just as a person puts on new garments after discarding the old ones, similarly Atma acquires new bodies after casting away the old bodies.

नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः॥ 2.23॥

"Naiynam chindanti shastrani naiynam dahati paavakah

Na ch ainam kledyanty aapo na shoshyati marutah"

Weapons do not cut this Atma, fire does not burn it, water does not make it wet, and the wind does not make it dry.

देही नित्यमवध्योऽयं देहे सर्वस्य भारत।
तस्मात्सर्वाणि भूतानि न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि॥ 2.30॥

"Dehee nityam avadhyo yam dehay sarvasya bhārata

Tasmaat sarvani bhutani na tvam shochitum arhasi"

The Atma that dwells in the body of all (beings) is eternally indestructible. Therefore, you should not grieve for any body.

जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च।
तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि॥ 2.27॥

"Jatasya hi dhruvo mriyur-dhruvam janma mritasya cha

Tasmad apariharye arthay na tvam shochitum arhasi"

Because, death is certain for the one who is born, and birth is certain for the one who dies. Therefore, you should not lament over the inevitable.

Gayatri Mantra

ओ३म् । भूर्भुवः स्वः । तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

*"AUM bhoor bhuvah swah. Tat savitur varenyam
bhargo devasya dheemahi.
Dhiyo yo nah pracho-dayaat"*

O Supreme Lord, you are the source of all existence, intelligence and bliss. We accept you and admire your powers. Please guide my intellect in the right direction.

Shantih Paath

ओ३म् ध्यौः शान्तिं रन्तरिक्षं शान्तिं पृथिवी
 शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः।
 वनास्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वे देवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म
 शान्तिः सवम् शान्तिः शान्तिरेव
 शान्तिः साम् शान्तिरेधि॥
 ओ३म् शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

“AUM Dyauh shaantir-antariksham shaantih prithivee
 Shaantir-aapah shaantir oshadhayah shaantih
 Vanaas-patayah shaantir vishwe devaah shaantir Brahma
 shaantih sarvam shaantih shaanti-reva
 shaantih saa maa shantir-edhi.
 AUM shantih, shantih, shantih.”

Let there be peace in heaven, sky and on earth. Let water flow to quench our thirst for peace. Let all trees and plants provide cool shade for a peaceful humanity. Let peace be in the hearts of all people. God is the Source of peace, and the Divine shows us the way to that peace. May that peace be everywhere. Let there be peace and only peace. May that peace come to me, too. May there be peace, peace and peace (in my body, mind and soul).

Maha Mrutunjaya Mantra

ओ३म् त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम्

उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनात् मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात्

“AUM Tryambakam yajamahe, sugandhim pushtivardhanam
 Urvarukamiva bandhanaat, mrityor mukshiya maamritat”

We meditate on the Three-eyed (Lord Shiva). Who nourishes all and fills with sweet fragrance of life. Just as a ripe fruit detaches itself with ease from its stem. May we be liberated from death for the sake of immortality.

Practice recommendations from Public Health England

Health and care professionals

This section provides recommendations for those working in the community with people at the end of life, to ensure that they are sensitive to any spiritual and faith needs that the person they care for may have:

- identify if the person you care for ascribes to a particular religion, and whether they expect this to have a bearing on their end of life care
- ask whether they have particular spiritual needs related to the end of life, listen to and record these needs
- determine whether the patient wants visits from a representative of their faith and whether they have a local religious leader they would prefer
- provide care recipients and their families with access to appropriate spiritual support and links to faith leaders
- establish the appropriateness and willingness of care recipients and their families to use the words ‘death’ and ‘dying’
- identify the role of the family in the decision-making process of the care plan
- ensure information regarding end of life care and support services are provided in the language of choice for the care recipients and their families
- seek advice and support in responding to any encounter you are unsure about with other staff, religious leaders or chaplains at the local hospital

Service providers and commissioners

The following are recommendations for those responsible for commissioning and providing end of life care services in the community:

- ensure all staff involved in care and bereavement support are trained in faith sensitivity and effective communication
- ensure care plans include space to record faith and requirements for the individual
- undertake locality asset mapping with local communities to quantify what support is available to communities and identify where there are gaps that require resourcing
- sign up to the ‘Dying Well Community Charter’ with National Council of Palliative Care
- ensure that community development approaches to end of life care include collaboration with local places of worship and faith communities



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