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GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS INTERACTING WITH JEWISH PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

Physicians and patients of the Jewish faith have been in our health care system ever since hospitals were organized in the United States. The variety of Jewish beliefs and practices - especially in most recent times - makes it difficult to provide detailed guidance for the health care provider. The classification of Jews into Hasidic, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform does not offer sufficient parameters to the health care provider until s/he asks the patient or family regarding their religious needs. Therefore, it is more helpful to be guided by the patient and family about which care they feel comfortable receiving. Each group has some of its own beliefs on certain issues – it is important to ask the patient and/or family regarding specific religious needs as early as possible in the course of their care. At this time, there are approximately 6,000,000 Jews in the United States with approximately 260,000 in the Chicagoland area.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Most Jews believe in *one*, indivisible, incorporeal (without a physical body) and eternal G-d¹ Who is creator of heaven and earth. Some consider the Almighty to be a personal G-d and approach the Deity in a special way. They believe that, as the supreme ruler, G-d gave us the **Torah** (law) that consists of 613 positive and negative commandments (**Mitzvot**). Many of these do not apply to one person in a lifetime, but many **Mitzvot** are seen as regular guides to life. The observant² Jew will also consider the **Oral Tradition** (as exemplified in the **Talmud** and the **Codes of Jewish Law**) to be guides in their daily behavior. For others, the **Torah** is a guide for moral and spiritual living without the imperative of “law.” Thus, some practices may be preferred but are not considered compulsory. These *Guidelines* will attempt to be applicable to every Jew regardless of denominational label.

CULTURE AND CELEBRATIONS

The Hebrew calendar is a lunar calendar and governs some religious behavior. At the same time, the religious holidays are connected to the seasons of the year and thus to the solar calendar as well. This is the reason for Jewish holidays falling on different secular dates. All biblically legislated holidays prohibit work on the first day (for some also the second day) of the holiday as well as the last day (or last two days).

While **Passover** is in the first of the Hebrew months as legislated by the **Torah**, the creation of the world is believed to have taken place in the seventh Hebrew month. (The number *seven* is

¹ G-d is spelled this way out of respect.

² Observant - Someone who ritually follows Jewish law to their level.

mystical in Hebrew lore.) **Rosh Hashana** (Hebrew for “head of the year”, noting *the birthday of the world*) is celebrated for two days with prayers in the synagogue and the eating of sweet dishes to ensure a sweet New Year. With **Rosh Hashana** begin the *Ten Days of Penitence*, during which many prayers request forgiveness for wrong doings. To highlight this thought, the **Shofar** (ram’s horn) is blown on **Rosh Hashana**, because its sound is a sign of alarm and evokes repentance. The **Shofar** also reminds Jews of the ram in the “Binding of Isaac” story in Genesis, and of Abraham’s faith in G-d, and the request for reprieve from punishment. A third thought is that the **Shofar** will herald the coming of the final redemption when all nations will beat their swords into plowshares.

Many consider **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement) to be the holiest day in the Hebrew calendar and its observance is widespread. It is a 25-hour fast day. While fasting is usually associated with sadness, this day’s fasting highlights its solemnity. **Yom Kippur** also teaches about those who are hungry. There are but twenty-five hours in which to request G-d’s forgiveness as He once forgave the Hebrews for worshipping the golden calf. Many dress in white for two reasons. Firstly, it is a sign of purity and Jews request that if their sins are as red as scarlet that G-d may change them to be white. The second reason - especially for men - is that the white garment is one in which one is buried at the end of one’s life journey. This evokes strong emotions for repentance. The night following this special day is one of celebration, because it is believed that the prayers were heard and all is forgiven, plus the fact that it ushers in the **Season of Joy, the holiday of Sukkot** (huts).

Sukkot is unique in that Jews leave permanent homes to live in a temporary, flimsy hut, at a time when the harvest was successfully gathered into the safety of the barns. This is to remind them that neither intelligence nor diligence brings success, but rather Divine Guidance does. The exit from the houses on **Sukkot** also teaches them about homelessness. During the **Sukkot** Morning Prayer service (except on the Sabbath) four plants are used to praise G-d: A branch of a palm tree, myrtles, water willows and a special citrus fruit known as an **Etrog**. **Sukkot** is celebrated for seven days. Following these are two more special days when many congregations complete the cycle of the weekly reading of the **Torah**.

In the winter comes the next holiday, **Chanuka**, which is not biblical and is considered a minor holiday. There is no restriction from work. **Chanuka** is celebrated for eight days. Lights are lit on each of the evenings of the festival, starting with one and increasing a light each night. This holiday commemorates the victory of the Maccabees who fought for the right to practice Judaism rather than fall prey to the Hellenist - Greek culture of paganism.

Another post-biblical holiday carrying no prohibition against work is the holiday of **Purim** (Lots) mentioned in the biblical book of Esther. This book is read from a scroll both evening and morning, and every time Haman the villain of the story is mentioned noisemakers are used to indicate displeasure. Haman wanted to see the Jewish People destroyed only because they were Jews and different from the majority Persians of his day. Esther, who was selected as queen, was able to avert this tragedy. The day is celebrated with food and drink, bringing gifts to friends and support for the needy. The children dress up in costumes.

The holiday of **Passover** arrives a month after **Purim**. It is found in the **Torah** and work is prohibited at the beginning and at the end. **Passover** celebrates the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Its specialness has much to do with food. Breadstuffs and leavened grain products are forbidden during **Passover**. **Matza** (unleavened bread) is eaten. **Passover** is celebrated for seven days in Israel and eight by many outside of the Holy Land.

Seven weeks after **Passover**, and connected by a nightly counting, is the holiday of **Shavuot** - Pentecost or feast of weeks (there is seven again 7X7). It is a biblical holiday/celebration and commemorates G-d's revelation on Mt. Sinai when He gave the **Torah** to the Israelites as it was condensed into the Ten Commandments. Several modern holidays, which come soon after Passover, include **Yom Ha-atzmaut** - Israel Independence Day and **Yom Hashoah** - Day of Remembering the Holocaust. A goodly portion of the Jewish People have returned to the Holy Land and have made the desert bloom against all odds. It is the hope of Jews that since Divine Edict promised the land to the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, peace would be established in that region and the world would learn how people can live together.

BELIEFS RELATED TO HEALTH CARE

Judaism believes in the sanctity of life and therefore is against suicide, assisted suicide or euthanasia. The body is the vehicle that carries the divine soul and therefore is considered G-d's property. It is to be treated with respect both during life and after death.

The **Torah** specifically enjoins the medical specialist to heal one who is ill or suffering. The **Talmud** teaches that one must live in a community where a physician is available. This approach rejects the thought that G-d is punishing the patient with illness and we humans dare not intervene with that, which is ordained. Rather, all means for healing and alleviating suffering are to be sought and used.

When a therapeutic procedure seems to contradict a biblical command, i.e. surgery on the **Sabbath** or eating on **Yom Kippur**, it is clear that one is to preserve one's life at all cost. However, if the therapeutic procedure can be done on a day other than the **Sabbath** or holiday without adverse effect, then the patient should be given the choice to comply with his religious observance.

Contained in the idea of *Imitatio Dei* (imitating G-dlike qualities) is the special command to visit the sick just as G-d visited Abraham after the circumcision. Often relatives and friends will want to visit, but shall do so only if it does not interfere with good health care.

Autopsies are a difficult issue in Jewish law. To do so routinely is not permitted because it mutilates the body, which is to be respected. Circumstances exist when, because of legal issues or family concerns, an autopsy is advised. The patient and/or family might elect to consult their rabbi. The question to be answered is "why is this necessary"?

Abortion is permissible only when the life or health of the mother is threatened. It may not be used as birth control. Birth control is also questioned also under **Torah** law, so Jews may wish to consult with a rabbi when making choices regarding reproduction.

Infant boys are usually circumcised on the eighth day after birth, health permitting. This is usually done by a **Mohel** – a circumcision specialist - who is trained specifically in the clinical and religious rules of this procedure. A list of **Mohalim** is appended to these *Guidelines*.

NURSING CARE

There are some very observant Jews who feel rather uncomfortable receiving care from a provider of the opposite gender. Some men would prefer a male physician, nurse or therapist. Likewise some women feel uncomfortable with treatment delivered by a male caregiver. These people may accept cross-gender care if they know that their team is the best available for their

treatment. Thus, it is suggested that when the same gender caregiver is available s/he should be the provider to alleviate unnecessary anxiety. If not, the care will be accepted.

In view of the prohibition of work on the **Sabbath** and holidays, special nursing attention may be given to the observant Jewish patient by nursing staff during **Sabbath** and biblical holidays. Since Jewish practice prohibits using electricity on these days some patients will not turn lights on or off, adjust the bed, use the call button or do anything with the telephone or television. An attentive nurse will make some extra time and ask whether things are all right and be aware that the patient may not ask for that which s/he cannot do her/himself. Thus, indirect requests will be used such as, "it is too bright in here" or "it is too dark in here" or "my head is too high" or similar indirect requests. This observance should be communicated to all the nursing shifts for this period of time. It is also understood that such patients should not be discharged on the **Sabbath** or biblical holidays because they cannot write, ride or be transported in motor vehicle nor carry objects out of the hospital. Discharge planning should take into account the **Sabbath** and holidays. Where possible, consent forms as well as menus should be given prior to these holy days to be completed.

When people are well, **Sabbaths** and holidays are times for the family to be together. This accounts for the increased feeling of aloneness on those days. If accommodation can be made for family and friends to stay within walking distance or stay in the hospital, it should be facilitated. This is especially true for patients who live out-of-town. Here a Jewish chaplain on staff can be of considerable assistance.

SPIRITUAL CARE/ PRAYERS

Jews believe that each person relates directly to a personal G-d and therefore needs no intermediary. While prayers by others both in the hospital and outside it are appreciated, the patient will want to take the responsibility for prayer. Often, an observant patient will become depressed if s/he cannot pray in the way s/he usually does because of the severity of his/her illness. It may be appreciated if the chaplain will recite the healing prayer (Mi Sh'berach) because that is often the format used in the synagogue. When a male patient can pray in his prayer shawl (Tallit) and phylacteries (Tefillin), he should be permitted to complete his/her prayer without disturbance if at all possible.

On the eve of the **Sabbath** and Holidays, many will want Sabbath/Holiday lights. Also, on the anniversary of death for someone related to the patient e.g. parent, sibling, spouse, child, memorial lights may be requested. On **Chanuka** a Chanukia (candelabra with eight lights) may be requested. Since hospitals cannot allow live flames electric lights are used and fulfill the religious requirements. The details should be discussed with the patient's Rabbi. On **Rosh Hashana** the blowing of the **Shofar** will bring comfort as will the plants on **Sukkot** and the reading of the **Book of Esther** on **Purim**. On the first night (or two nights) of **Passover** many Jewish patients will want to celebrate with a special service and meal known as **Seder**. It is most desirable to arrange for this ceremony if the patient feels up to participating. Avoidance of the forbidden foods as well as availability of the **Kosher for Passover** foods is believed to aid the patient recovery.

DIET/FOOD PREFERENCES AND PRACTICES

The more observant Jewish patient will want to eat a **Kosher** diet during any hospital stay. Kosher means "proper" and refers to the rules in the **Torah** as well as the **Codes**. It never includes pork. Meat must come from an animal that chews its cud and has completely cloven hoofs, i.e. cow, sheep, goat, deer. Fowl are those which have been eaten in the past specified

by tradition, i.e. chicken, turkey, duck. A ritually trained expert must slaughter them. In the process, the animal does not suffer and the maximum amount of blood is ejected from the body. To complete the task of removing the remainder of the blood following slaughter the meat is soaked in water, then salted while it lies on a slanted, perforated board to have the blood run off, and then thoroughly washed to remove the salt and any remaining blood. For those who are on a completely salt-free diet the blood can be removed by broiling. Meat and dairy may not be eaten together. Meat may be eaten after dairy when half an hour has elapsed. Dairy after meat may not be eaten for a considerable time depending on the custom of the family. Snacks must be planned around these time restrictions. People with special diets must consult the dietitian to find the supplier of that particular diet which is **Kosher**. This may take some research. When not available then planning of the physician and/or dietitian about which foods may be brought from home may be the only solution.

Kosher packaged food must be certified as such. This is indicated on the package by a copyrighted insignia of the certifying rabbinical body. To heat **Kosher** food in a non-Kosher oven, the food must be double wrapped in the original container with the wrapping in tact. The wrapping should then be removed by the patient, member of the family, or by hospital personnel in the patient's presence. Often removal of the wrapping is difficult for the patient because of weakness. Disposable ware and plastic silverware should be used. Double wrapping also works for kosher food brought from home to be heated in a microwave oven. A family member shall observe the process.

Passover has its special food problems. Since leavened grain products may not be used, everything that is served must be certified as **Kosher for Passover** by a reliable rabbinical source. Also peas, beans, maize, (corn) rice and peanuts and their byproducts are not eaten during this period by Jews of Eastern European origin. None of these products are to be used either by themselves or in a mixture with permissible food.

Beyond these Kosher restrictions, specialty foods, which are eaten on certain holidays, are custom only. While they are appreciated, the hospital need not supply them. If appropriate for the patient's diet, they may be brought from home.

END OF LIFE CARE

Withdrawal of medical supports, autopsy, organ transplant, withholding or removing nutrition and hydration are best handled by seeking the advice of the patient's and/or family's Rabbi. When there is none, and the family agrees, the chaplain may act as the religious guide according to the wishes of the family. Many authorities agree that organ transplant is permissible after the donor has been declared dead by the criteria of full brain death. Rabbinical input is of paramount importance here. Cremation is not permitted and is not practiced by the majority of Jews.

Burial should take place as soon as possible after death. All organs (with the exception of those donated) should be buried with the body. Also, any blood that is lost after death should be buried. It is best that all tubes be tied off and removed by the Jewish funeral director so that any blood still remaining in the tubes will be buried. Another alternative is to assure that hemostasis is maintained by bandaging any insertion sites in the body where blood may leak out. This may be accomplished by applying appropriate dressings to the sites and making sure the individual is shrouded and transported to the funeral home with the dressings intact. This request will usually be made by very observant families. The patient at the time of death should have the eyes closed and be covered with a sheet. If possible, the deceased should not be moved unless absolutely necessary. Also, the body should not be left alone. Members

of the family, friends or personnel from the funeral home should attend the body in order to say prayers i.e. Psalms. When the body must be moved to the morgue, it may be done. The hospital should facilitate allowing **Shomrim** (watch persons) to attend the body if it is moved. On the **Sabbath** or festivals it may be more difficult to notify the family and the funeral director may be slower in the response. It is important to give respect to the body even after death, for it is G-d's.

Jewish law makes no special provisions for miscarriages, stillborn deaths or infant deaths at less than thirty (30) days of life except for the directive to bury. However, a number of Rabbis have developed special services for these losses to help the family mourn and continue with life.

Hospice care is within the parameters of Jewish Law. Palliative care is permitted when it clearly relieves suffering at a time when medical intervention is no longer beneficial.

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

Chicago Rabbinical Council	773.465.3900
Chicago Board of Rabbis	312.444.2896
Ezra Help Line	800.248.1818

Mohalim

<i>Barrows, Dr. William</i>	312.280.1460
<i>Elsberg, Cantor Lawrence</i>	847.480.1999
<i>Fuerst, Rabbi Shmuel</i>	773.539.4241
<i>Koval, Rabbi Yisroel</i>	847.279.0927
<i>Kushner, Rabbi Moshe</i>	773.743.0537
<i>Landau, Cantor David</i>	847.274.7626
<i>Lantos, Dr. John</i>	773-667.2002
<i>Marx, Dr. Phyllis</i>	847.673.3130
<i>Polin, Dr. Stanton</i>	773.685.0110
<i>Rich, Dr. Nancy</i>	630.323.4343
<i>Rubin, Dr. Ira</i>	630.717.5075
<i>Tarkieltaub, Rabbi Mordecai</i>	800/200.9442
<i>Ullman, Dr. Julian</i>	312.726.3917
<i>Wasser, Cantor Eric</i>	847.256.1213 ext. 13
<i>Weiss, Dr. Sheldon</i>	773.775.2180
<i>Wolff, Rev. Noah</i>	773.338.5599
<i>Zbaraz, Dr. David</i>	312.726.3917

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