



## QUICK REFERENCE FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS INTERACTING WITH JEHOVAH'S WITNESS PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

For more complete information on interacting with Jehovah's Witness patients, please see the complete version of the *Guidelines For Health Care Providers Interacting With Jehovah's Witnesses And Their Families*. This Quick Reference is meant to assist Health Care Workers in Emergency Situations.

<p><b>GENERAL</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses believe in Almighty God, Jehovah, the Creator of the heavens and earth. They believe that the very existence of the intricately designed wonders in the universe surrounding us reasonably argues that a supremely intelligent and powerful Creator produced it all. They also believe that Jehovah God had a purpose in his creations. Their beliefs are based on the Bible and not on "mere human speculations" or religious creeds. They consider the Bible's 66 books to be inspired and historically accurate. They interpret the Bible literally except where the expressions or settings obviously indicate that they are figurative or symbolic.</li> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses do not participate in nationalistic ceremonies, such as saluting the flag. They also do not celebrate traditional Christian holy days, such as Christmas, or birthdays.</li> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses accept medical and surgical treatment. They do not adhere to so-called "faith healing" and are not opposed to the practice of medicine.</li> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the taking of mind-altering medications and drugs, including narcotics for severe pain, under the supervision of a physician, is a matter for personal decision although they may not want to resort too quickly or without good cause to drugs that are addictive or hallucinatory if other effective methods of treatment were available or if endurance of temporary pain would be the preferable course.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GENDER ISSUES/ BODY EXPOSURE</b></p>	<p>Each patient who is one of Jehovah's Witnesses will decide what is appropriate for him or her according to his or her circumstances.</p>
<p><b>END OF LIFE CARE</b></p>	<p>Jehovah's Witnesses believe life is sacred and the willful taking of life under any health care circumstance would be wrong. For this reason, reasonable and humane effort should be made to sustain and prolong life. However, Jehovah's Witnesses believe the Scriptures do not require that extraordinary, complicated, distressing and costly measures be taken to sustain a person, if such, in the general consensus of the attending physicians, would merely prolong the dying process and/or leave the patient with no quality of life. Medical personnel should respect the patient's Advance Directive.</p>
<p><b>BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that blood transfusions are forbidden for them. They believe that taking blood into the body through the mouth or veins violates God's laws. However, Witnesses' religious understanding does not absolutely prohibit the use of fractions such as albumin, immune globulins and hemophiliac preparations; each witness must decide individually if he or she can accept these.</li> <li>▪ Nonblood expanders, and some drugs (including dextran, hydroxyethyl starch, aprotinin, antifibrinolytics) are acceptable to Witness patients.</li> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept preoperative autologous blood donation. Autotransfusion techniques such as hemodilution and cell salvage are a matter for personal decision.</li> <li>▪ Hemodialysis is a matter for each Witness patient to decide conscientiously when no blood prime is used.</li> <li>▪ Serums are not forbidden; however, an individual Witness may still conscientiously refuse them. The same applies to minor blood fractions.</li> <li>▪ Alternatives to blood transfusions may be requested by Witness patients. They may include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ <u>Use of fluids</u> such as Ringer's lactate, dextran, hydroxyethyl starch and others to maintain blood volume, preventing hypovolemic shock.</li> <li>√ <u>Drugs</u>: Genetically engineered proteins can stimulate the production of red blood cells (erythropoietin), blood platelets (interleukin-11), and various white blood cells (GM-CSF, G-CSF) and other medications greatly reduce blood loss during surgery</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>(aprotinin, antifibrinolytics) or help reduce acute bleeding (desmopressin).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ <u>Biological hemostats</u>: Collagen and cellulose woven pads that stop bleeding by direct application; fibrin glues and sealants can plug puncture wounds or cover large areas of bleeding tissue.</li> <li>√ <u>Blood salvage</u>: Blood lost during surgery or trauma is salvaged, cleansed and can be returned to the patient in a closed circuit.</li> <li>√ <u>Surgical tools</u>: Devices that cut and seal blood vessels simultaneously or devices that seal bleeding on large areas of tissue. Laparoscopic and minimally invasive instruments that enable surgeries to be performed without the blood loss associated with large incisions.</li> </ul>
<b>DIETARY ISSUES</b>	Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from eating the meat of animals from which blood has not been properly drained. They also refrain from eating such things as blood sausage and blood soup. No special preparation is required. The patient can manage his or her own diet within the hospital dietary parameters.
<b>RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses may practice daily prayers and reading of scriptures, which provides mental and spiritual comfort.</li> <li>▪ Members of the congregation and elders may visit to pray with the sick person and read scriptures.</li> <li>▪ Witnesses do not observe special rituals that are to be performed for the sick or those dying. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide medical assistance, comfort and spiritual care needed by the patient.</li> </ul>
<b>ORGAN DONATION/RECEIPT OF TISSUE OR ORGANS</b>	While Witnesses believe the Bible specifically forbids consuming blood, they believe there is no Biblical command that pointedly forbids the taking in of tissue or bone from another human. Whether to accept an organ transplant is a personal decision. The same is true for organ donation.
<b>FAMILY ISSUES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In all congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, <i>Local Congregation Elders</i> (a body of elders) function to provide needed spiritual and emotional support to members and their families on a weekly basis while the member is a patient. These elders are familiar with the convictions of the Witness patient and can better communicate with them. This can help eliminate misunderstandings and can facilitate medical treatment by physicians.</li> <li>▪ The patient (or parents/guardians of young children) should be fully informed on diagnosis, prognosis and treatment recommendations so that informed health care decisions can be made. Parents have the legal right to make such decisions for their unemancipated children. In rare emergent situations where doctors believe it is necessary to obtain a court order to impose medical care for which the parents have not given consent (such as administering a blood transfusion), the parents should be informed of such intended action as early as possible so that they may also be represented in court.</li> </ul>
<b>AUTOPSY</b>	Unless there is a compelling reason, such as when an autopsy is required by law, Jehovah's Witnesses generally prefer that the body not be subjected to postmortem dissection. The appropriate family member can decide if a limited autopsy is advisable to determine the cause of death.
<b>CARE OF THE DECEASED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Jehovah's Witnesses do not practice special rituals for the deceased. Consult the family for their preferences.</li> <li>▪ If the death is subject to investigation by the local Medical Examiner or Coroner, follow established procedures. Be sure to notify the Medical Examiner or Coroner of any special religious beliefs or family requests.</li> </ul>
<b>CONTACT INFORMATION &amp; RESOURCES ON THE WEB</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hospital Liaison Committee for Jehovah's Witnesses: In the Chicago area, contact Jesse Graziani 708/795-4852 or 708/962-2034 or Ronald Sheaffer, 630/584-3656 or 708/348-0118</li> <li>▪ Watchtower, Medical Care and Blood, <a href="http://www.watchtower.org/medical_care_and_blood.htm">http://www.watchtower.org/medical_care_and_blood.htm</a></li> </ul>