



QUICK REFERENCE FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS INTERACTING WITH SIKH PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

For more complete information on interacting with Sikh patients, please see the complete version of the *Guidelines For Health Care Providers Interacting With Patients of the Sikh Religion and Their Families*. This *Quick Reference* is meant to assist Health Care Workers in Emergency Situations.

<p>GENERAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The fundamental belief of Sikhs is that there is only One, Universal, Formless, Timeless God of all the people, Who is also the creator of this universe and all living beings. “Sikh” means a disciple, and Sikhism is a path of discipline of meditating on God’s name, earning a living by honest means, sharing good fortunes with the needy, and selfless service to humanity. Sikhs believe that whosoever is born has eventually to die. The physical body is perishable, but the soul is eternal. The soul is a part of God and it yearns reunion with the Supreme Being. Liberation from the cycle of birth and death, from millions of life forms, is the basis of the Sikh understanding of the purpose of life. Human life is the gift of the Divine, and its termination, a return to the Divine source. ▪ Initiated Sikhs, also known as <i>Khalsa</i>, at all times wear on their person five religious symbols that are articles of faith. They are known as 5K’s because their names start with the letter “K.” <p style="margin-left: 40px;">The Five K’s (Articles of Faith) are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Un-cut hair (<i>Kesh</i>), a gift from God representing spirituality; 2. A wooden comb (<i>Kangha</i>), symbolizes cleanliness; 3. A steel bracelet (<i>Kara</i>), represents self restraint and link to God; 4. A short sword (<i>Kirpaan</i>), an emblem of courage and commitment to truth and justice; 5. A type of underwear knickers (<i>Kachhehra</i>), represents purity of moral character. ▪ The religious significance of the headdress (a male turban or a female scarf) should be respected, because it is a covering for one of the 5K’s (<i>Kesh</i>) and is also a symbol of a Sikh’s honor. ▪ Generally, practicing Sikhs do not cut their hair, and do not consume tobacco products, alcohol, intoxicants or other illicit drugs. ▪ Respect modesty and privacy (knock on the door, announce your arrival, etc.). ▪ Do not interrupt a praying patient for routine care. ▪ Respect the patient’s personal space by limiting unnecessary touching. ▪ Be sensitive to the significance of the Sikh’s five K’s, (religious symbols or articles of faith) which they may choose to wear on their person at all times. Again, they are uncut hair (<i>Kesh</i>), a wooden comb (<i>Kangha</i>), a steel bracelet (<i>Kara</i>), underwear (<i>Kachhehra</i>), and a ceremonial sword (<i>Kirpaan</i>). ▪ After removing their headdress, Sikh patients may want to keep their head covered with an alternative covering such as a small turban or a scarf. (A surgical bouffant cap is acceptable.) The headdress should be respected, and if removed, it should be given to the family or placed with the patient’s personal belongings. <u>Do not place the headdress with the shoes.</u> ▪ Infants may be required to wear religious symbols e.g. “Kara” (a steel bracelet). ▪ Consult patient, family (or the parents in case of an child) prior to shaving or removing hair from any part of the patient’s body. This applies to both male and female patients.
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GENDER ISSUES/ BODY EXPOSURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sikh women may insist on covering their bodies with more than a hospital gown. They may request that when possible, examinations be done while a female patient wears a gown. ▪ Although Sikhism does not ban treatment from being provided by a practitioner of the opposite sex, providing the patient with of the same sex practitioner when possible is preferable, especially if the patient requests it.
BLOOD TRANSFUSIONS	Blood transfusions are allowed.
FAMILY ISSUES	It is a Sikh cultural and religious practice to visit the sick.
DIETARY ISSUES	Sikhs do not eat any ritual meat prepared by either sacrificing the animal to please God, or by killing the animal slowly to drain out the blood. Zabiha/Halal meat, (meat prepared the Islamic way), is forbidden for Sikhs to partake. Vegetarian or non-vegetarian meals are individual preferences. Sikhs do not observe fasting for any religious reasons.
END OF LIFE CARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintaining a terminal patient on artificial life support for a prolonged period in a vegetative state is not encouraged. ▪ In matters of terminal care, the attending physician should consult the patient, the family, the ethicist, and preferably, a Sikh scholar before making a final decision. ▪ Health care providers, including nurses, physicians and chaplains should comfort the terminally ill patient, making sure he/she is pain-free, have his/her relatives and friends nearby, and have access to a Sikh <i>Granthi</i> (a Sikh), who can recite <i>Gurbani</i> (writings of the Gurus) and perform Sikh prayers. At the departure of their loved ones, Sikhs console themselves with the recitation of their sacred hymns.
ORGAN DONATION/RECEIPT OF TISSUE OR ORGANS	Organ transplantation, both donating and receiving, is allowed.
AUTOPSY	Autopsy is permitted.
CARE OF THE DECEASED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It is important that funeral and cremation arrangements be made in advance in consultation with the family and according to the wishes of the dying or deceased patient, if possible. ▪ With minimum delay, the body is to be removed to the funeral home for expeditious cremation, unless the family is waiting for a close relative to arrive. Provide routine post-mortem care. The body should be covered with clean linens and shrouded. If the person is wearing any of the 5K's, they should remain with the body. ▪ Allow the family and Sikh <i>Granthi</i>, to follow Sikh traditions for preparing the dead body for funeral. The dead body should be given the same respect as during life. ▪ 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.
RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES	Sikh art, song, dance, commemorations and celebrations are marked by the agricultural cycle and seasonal moods.
CONTACT INFORMATION & RESOURCES ON THE WEB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sikh Religious Society of Chicago, 847/358-1117 or 847/359-5142 ▪ Sikh American Heritage Organization, 630/377-5893 ▪ The Sikhism Homepage, http://www.sikhs.org/ ▪ The SikhNetwork, http://www.sikhnet.com/