

Blog: Hospice Views

The Culture Connection: Muslim End-of-Life Practices

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*The Culture Connection blog series covers various customs and practices that someone involved in end-of-life care might encounter. Please refer to the [introduction to this blog series](#) for general advice. Today we look at **Islamic end-of-life traditions**.*

The fundamental belief for Muslims is the oneness of God and belief in Muhammad as the last Prophet of God. Islam is built on [five pillars](#): Declaration of Faith, Prayer, Fasting (for the entire month of Ramadan, from dawn to dusk), Charity and Pilgrimage to Mecca (site of the [Holy Sanctuary built by Abraham](#)).

In Islam, death is seen as a *natural event*, and one's life is lived in preparation for the next. Sickness at the end of life may be painful or uncomfortable, or it may be peaceful and pain-free. However it happens, it's considered to be part of one's journey toward the end of life on earth. **The Qur'an** says, "*To God we belong and to Him is our return.*"

During illness, Muslims are expected to seek God's help with patience and prayer, increase their remembrance of God to obtain peace, ask for forgiveness, give more in charity and read or listen to the Qur'an.

Muslims prefer that an imam (leader of a mosque) be called to visit the sick, but many imams have secular jobs, so *any* Muslim may comfort the sick. A patient may request to lie in a bed facing in the direction of Mecca.

The role of a non-Muslim chaplain, in my experience, depends on the preferences of each patient and their family.

One Muslim family welcomed me to pray with them, saying, "*We're praying to the same God.*" Others may feel only a Muslim imam should provide spiritual support. I don't take either choice personally but realize they are doing *what they think is best* within their belief system. I do my best to be supportive and connect patients and families with their religious community and resources.

Due to dietary restrictions, some Muslims may decline hospital food and have family bring their meals.

Fasting during Ramadan (the Holy Month when fasting represents submission to the will of Allah) is *not required* of the sick.

When possible, women should be examined by women physicians and nurses, and men by men.

Muslims have rules about washing and hygiene, so these should be respected *as much as possible*.

One prayer a Muslim may say during illness is:

O God! Behold, I beg of Thee peace in this world and the hereafter. O God! Behold, I beg of Thee forgiveness and safety in my faith, in my world, in my household and in my wealth. O God! Cover my defects, and give me peace from my apprehension.

Or:

O God! Set aright my faith which is the safeguard of my affairs. Set aright my world wherein is my living. Set aright my hereafter whereto shall be return. Let life be a source of increase in every righteousness unto me, a means of relief from every evil.

Families may try to take patients home on the two *big* Muslim festival days: **Eed-ul-Fitr** (end of Ramadan) and **Eed-ul-Azha** (commemoration of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismael).

The Culture Connection continues in part 2 with a look at Islam [after-death traditions](#).

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<https://www.crossroadshospice.com/healthcare-professionals-resources/palliative-care-blog/2015/october/13/the-culture-connection-muslim-end-of-life-practices/>