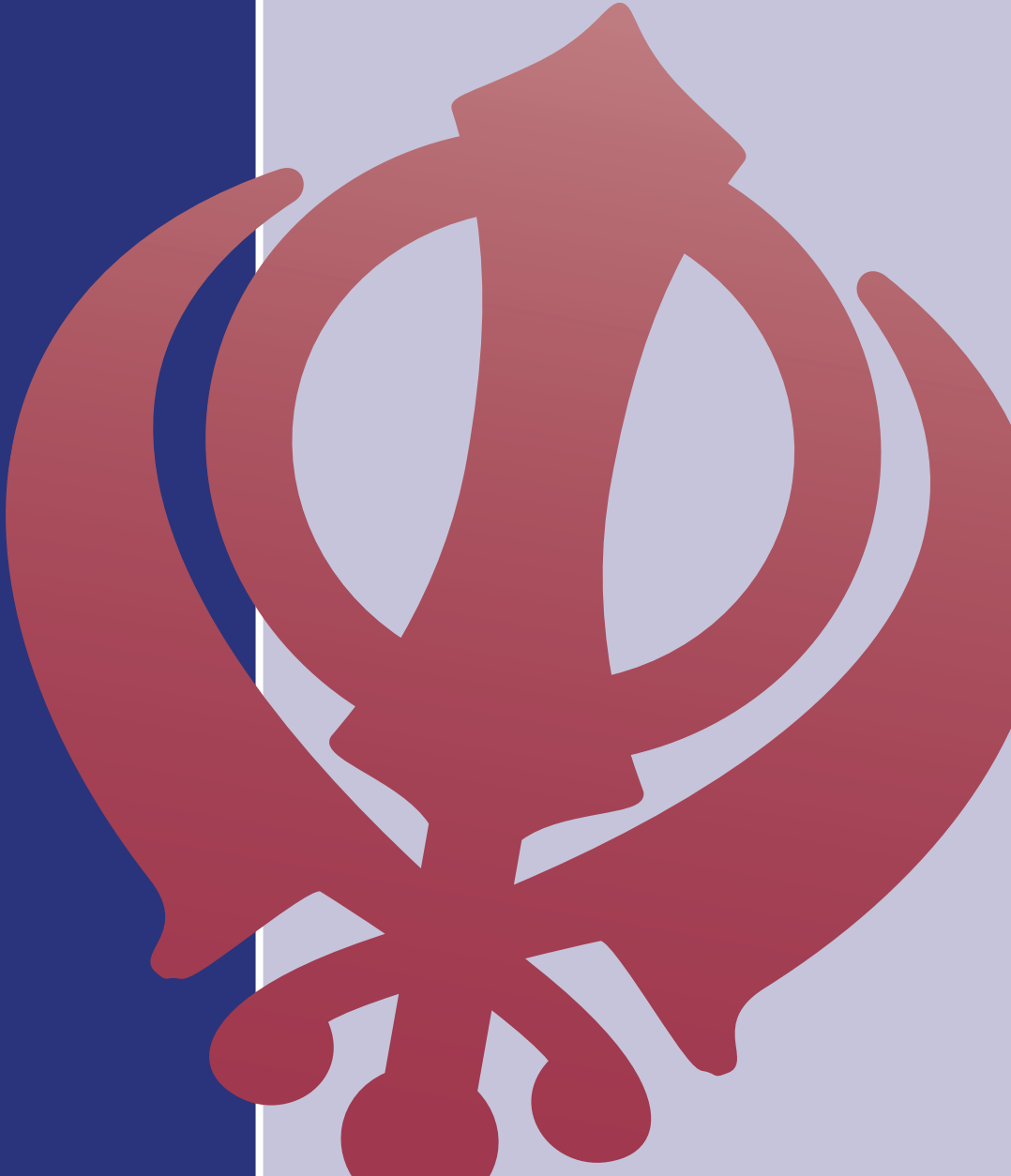


CARING FOR A SIKH PATIENT

A guide to understanding the needs of Sikh patients



This text has been produced on behalf of the Sikh healthcare chaplaincy group by Harinder Singh. It is taken from a variety of sources on Sikhism and provides guidance for those dealing with a Sikh patient. The author apologises for any mistakes, and omissions. Each person is an individual, and each person has their own beliefs and practices. These should always be respected. The guidance set out in this text is not meant to be prescriptive, its aim is to inform others and give them a better understanding.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record of this booklet is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-9548412-1-8

Front Cover image: the Khanda, is the symbol of the Sikhs, reflecting some of the fundamental concepts of Sikhism. The symbol derives its name from the double-edged sword which appears at the center of the logo. This double-edged sword is a metaphor of Divine Knowledge, its sharp edges cleaving Truth from Falsehood. The circle around the Khanda is the Chakar. The Chakar being a circle without a beginning or an end symbolizes the perfection of God who is eternal. The Chakar is surrounded by two curved swords called Kirpans. These two swords symbolize the twin concepts of Meeri and Peeri - Temporal and Spiritual authority. They emphasise the equal emphasis that a Sikh must place on spiritual aspirations as well as obligations to society.

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Caring for a Sikh Patient

INTRODUCTION

Caring for a Sikh patient in your hospital may appear a daunting task, because Sikhism is a faith that teaches a way of life and touches many areas of life. However, through discussions with your Sikh patient and through the information contained in this booklet there should be an informed decision about how best the religious needs of a Sikh patient can be made.

The aim of this booklet is to provide those caring for a Sikh patient with a means to understand them, and have an opportunity to be able to provide services for them that are in line with their faith and their practice. As Sikhism is over 500 years old it has a very rich heritage and this guide does not aim to be definitive and provide the answer to every question.

The booklet is split into four sections which cover:

Part One	Guidance for caring for a Sikh patient
Part Two	Defining a care plan for a Sikh patient
Part Three	Sikhism, the basic rules and concepts
Part Four	Further resources

Part one discusses immediate specific issues, and other matters which may be of concern for medical and nursing staff. A variety of settings including mental health issues to death are discussed. Part two discusses the steps that should be taken to defining a care plan for a Sikh patient and puts in place a suggested model to do so. Part three offers an understanding to the basic principles guiding the Sikh faith. Part four helps professionals find further resources and support for caring for Sikh patients in the UK.

The role of a Sikh Chaplain

In many UK hospitals there are now Sikh chaplains who work within chaplaincy teams. They are able to help in ensuring the patient has access to support from their community and access to religious priests, religious prayer books and to access the resources in local gurdwaras. If issues of concern arise from caring for a Sikh patient, a chaplain may be able to help both the healthcare team and the patient with a suitable solution.

PART ONE

GUIDANCE FOR CARING FOR A SIKH PATIENT

Receiving medical treatment

Almost all forms of medical treatment are permitted for Sikhs, and indeed medical treatment to treat illnesses is encouraged by the faith so that Sikhs can enjoy and live their chosen life. Sikhs are not prohibited from seeking medical care, nor are they prohibited from receiving medical treatment.

Sikhism values the sciences and the knowledge of healthcare practitioners, and Sikhs are not prohibited from using any medical procedures. However, cutting any hair is considered to be disrespectful, some patients resist shaving the hair on the body before an operation or for medical investigation.

Patient Confidentiality

Sikhs tend to have strong family networks and connections. The extended family is an important part of their lives and the family system tends to be very close knit. It is important to ask the patient if they are comfortable discussing 'sensitive issues' with who is in the room. As respect is given to elders, they may be called upon to see patients before other family members. These cultural sensitivities should be discussed with the patient if at all possible to ensure the extended family system is respected.

There are also language barriers for some Sikhs, especially those who are elderly and for those where English is not their first language. The majority of Sikhs will speak Punjabi (Pronounced pun jaa bee) 'Panjabi' is an alternative spelling) as their first language or mother tongue. In cases where an interpreter is required, someone with a sound grasp of Punjabi should be found. This could be a family member in many cases and judgement should be exercised for the sake of the patient's dignity and self-respect when using family members as interpreters.

General Beliefs and Practices

(Individual Practices may vary, see part two for further discussion regarding this)

- Blood transfusions are allowed.
- Assisted suicide and euthanasia are not encouraged. Sikhs are discouraged in their faith to terminate their lives before the will of God dictates. Sikhs have a high respect for life which they see as a gift from God and that we have a duty to use life in a responsible way. Most Sikhs are against euthanasia, as they believe that the timing of birth and death should be left in God's hands.
- Maintaining a terminal patient on artificial life support for a prolonged period in a vegetative state is not encouraged.
- Organ transplantation, both donating and receiving, is allowed. Sikh philosophy and teachings place great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself. Sikh teachings also stress the importance of noble deeds, selfless giving and sacrifice. This is exemplified by the behaviour of the ten Gurus in the Sikh teachings. Saving a human life is one of the greatest things one can do according to the Sikh religion. For this reason, donating organs after death is acceptable to Sikhs.

Sikhs believe in life after death, and a continuous cycle of rebirth. But the physical body is not needed in this cycle. The soul of a person is eternal, but the body is simply flesh and perishable. If another person can make use of organs from a Sikh's body, this is a good thing.

- Post-Mortem examinations are permitted. Though no hair should be removed during the investigation.
- Genetic engineering to cure a disease is acceptable. To date, Sikhs are opposed to human cloning.
- Infants are not circumcised.
- Still births are considered to be treated the same as living individuals and Sikh families tend to perform funerals for babies that are still born.

Beliefs relating to life threatening conditions

If a patient's condition is such that his/her life may possibly be in danger, and there is no time to ask or seek advice, all medical treatment designed to avert the threat to life should be carried out without question and without delay. The cutting of any hair should be avoided unless urgent or life threatening medical treatment cannot be carried out.

Beliefs relating to non-dangerous medical conditions

A patient who is not dangerously ill should be allowed to maintain his five K's during his medical treatment and all steps should be taken to allow them to be able to wear these throughout their treatment where it is reasonable to do so.

Beliefs relating to the five Ks and medical treatment

Baptised Sikhs wear the five K's from the moment of their baptism ceremony. To determine whether a Sikh is baptised, the questions to ask are:

Have you taken 'Amrit'? (Amrit is the term in Panjabi that refers to the baptism ceremony) Do you wear all of the five K's? If the answer is Yes to these questions you can assume the patient is a baptised Sikh. The five K's are an important part of a Sikh's life. A discussion concerning their significance is in part three. The five K's consist of five articles of faith,

Kirpan, the sword

Kangha, comb worn in the hair

Kesh, uncut hair, a turban is normally worn

Kachh or Kashera, cotton breeches or shorts

Kara, a steel or iron bangle

For a baptised Sikh, these articles of faith are to be worn at all times. The turban is not one of the five K's, but it is an integral part of the faith and a key article of faith to most Sikhs due to the nature of their uncut hair. Therefore, wherever possible permission must be sought before the removal of any of these articles of faith and all attempts must be made to allow a baptised Sikh to wear their five K's. Please note that both men and women wear the 5 K's.

General guidance for caring for a Sikh patient

The principles for caring for a Sikh patient should include the preservation of the patient's faith; sanctity of life, alleviation of suffering, respect for the patient's autonomy, and always being honest and truthful in giving information.

Important aspects in the care for Sikh patients include the following:

- Do not interrupt a praying patient for routine care.
- 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 (Kesh), a wooden comb (Kangha), a steel bracelet (Kara), underwear (Kachh or Kasherah), and a ceremonial sword (Kirpaan).
- After removing their turban (headdress), Sikh patients may want to keep their head covered with an alternative covering such as a small turban or a scarf. The headdress should be respected, and if removed, it should be given to the family or placed with the patient's personal belongings.

Do not place the headdress with the shoes or near the floor. The reason for this is that the articles of faith are to be treated with the highest respect by a Sikh. Note: This should apply to all the five K's if any are removed.

- Infants may be required to wear religious symbols e.g. "Kara" (a steel bracelet).
- Consult the patient, family (or the parents in case of a child) prior to shaving or removing hair from any part of the patient's body. This applies to both male and female patients.
- Sikh women may insist on covering their bodies with more than a hospital gown for cultural reasons. 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 a same sex practitioner when possible is preferable, especially if the patient requests it.
- Cleanliness is part of the Sikh way of life. Daily bathing and personal hygiene care should be provided unless advised otherwise by the attending medical and nursing staff due to a medical reason. Washing and conditioning of hair, including male facial hair, with shampoo or soap should be done as frequently as needed. Hair can be dried naturally or with an electric hair dryer. Hair should be combed daily at a minimum.
- It is a Sikh cultural and religious practice to visit the sick. Therefore various sets of family members, both immediate and extended may come to visit the patient.

Diet/Food preferences and practices

Sikhs do not eat any meat that is ritually prepared by either sacrificing the animal to please God, or by killing the animal slowly to drain out the blood. Halal meat, (meat prepared the Islamic way), is forbidden for Sikhs to partake. As is Kosher meat)

Vegetarian or non-vegetarian meals are individual preferences. If there are no dietary restrictions, the patient may be asked his/her food preferences, and/or allowed to bring food from home. Sikhs do not observe fasting for any religious reasons.

Spiritual Care/prayers

A prayer room for Sikhs may be provided. The room should be quiet, clean and carpeted. An inter-faith space sensitive to the needs of persons of diverse traditions is acceptable. Sikhs have a variety of prayers they perform at different times through the day. It is best to consult with the patient what their prayer schedule is. Prayers will take place in the morning once the patient has had an opportunity to bathe. The Sikh healthcare chaplaincy group provides prayer books to hospitals for patients to use. These should be lent to the patient should they request them or they should be allowed to bring their own prayer books. These must be respected and not placed on the floor, near any shoes and ideally should be kept and stored on their own if possible.

During times of sickness and disease, Sikhs pray to seek God's help, remember Waheguru (God's name) to obtain peace, to obtain healing and ask for forgiveness. They may recite or listen to Gurbani, the sacred hymns, which are God's words uttered through the Sikh Gurus and enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Scripture). The sacred word provides them with physical and spiritual strength and nourishment. Sikh patients may request audiotapes/CDs of Keertan (sacred music) to be played by their bedside. Where this is not possible, the use of headphone equipment should be encouraged to allow the patient to be able to listen to their religious material. Sikh patients may consider illness to be the will of God, and also believe that God is merciful and benevolent, but one has to make an effort to get well which includes medical treatment. Sikhs may also choose to meditate, or perform yoga. Sikhs may also request to use a 'mala', these are prayer beads used to count the number of recitals of verses so that the desired number can be performed.

The main Sikh prayers are the Japji, performed in the morning, the Rehraas, performed as the day ends, the Kirtan Sohila, performed towards the end of the evening. Other prayers are the Sukhmani Sahib, Anand Sahib and various others. Prayers can be performed anywhere, as long as the patient is able to concentrate and have an environment where they're mind can remain focused on the prayer. Therefore, in open ward environments, a private room to conduct the prayer may be more suitable.

Childbirth

Men are permitted at the birth. Sikhs have a special naming ceremony for their children and therefore it may not be possible for them to give the child a name whilst they are in hospital. Sensitivity to this should be applied by those dealing with the parents.

Also, it is normally practice to place the kara, a steel bangle on the child after birth. Where possible, parents should be allowed to do this as soon as possible.

End of Life care - terminally ill patients

Everything that happens is the will of God. Healing through prayer and through medicine are both possible. Many people will willingly accept the will of God rather than go through difficult treatments. When a patient dies, scripture reading and prayer are carried out, and a service for the deceased is held about a week later.(this can vary)

For most patients having his/her relatives and friends nearby, and having access to a Sikh Granthi (a Sikh priest), who can recite Gurbani (writings of the Gurus) and perform Sikh prayers are an essential part of their final days. At the departure of their loved ones, Sikhs console themselves with the recitation of their sacred hymns.

With minimal delay, once they have passed away the body is to be removed to the funeral home to prepare for cremation, unless the family is waiting for a close relative to arrive. Providing routine post-mortem care is permissible. 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 the Sikh Granthi to follow Sikh traditions for preparing the dead body for funeral. The dead body should be given the same respect as during life.

In certain cases, if permissible, the family may wash and clothe the body immediately after death, prior to removal.

Mental Health Issues

Mental health issues must be dealt with the sincerest of discretion. For Sikhs who are baptised, every effort should be made to ensure they are able to maintain these five K's. The family should be consulted on what is the best approach to take with regards to the practice of their faith. Sikhs with mental health issues are allowed to attend communal prayers, and there are no restrictions on them practising their faith. Family members can provide guidance on the patients practice before the onset and during any periods of mental health issues.

PART TWO

DEFINING A CARE PLAN FOR A SIKH PATIENT

Sikhism is a way of Life. The word Sikh means student and for every Sikh the practice of their faith and the interpretation of their principles may differ slightly. It is the right of any individual to determine their practice. Sikhism permits free will and it is ultimately the choice of the individual as to how they wish to practice.

For baptised Sikhs, there are certain codes of conduct that they must adhere to without exception. The wearing of the five K's and regular prayer are main principles.

When dealing with a Sikh patient, it is best to ask them as to how they feel about any issues arising from the removal of the five K's for their medical treatment. If in doubt, it is best to consult with a Sikh chaplain or community members who tend to be involved with the Gurdwara, the Sikh place of worship. Alternatively, the Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group can provide guidance.

It is important to note the distinction between Sikh and baptised Sikhs. Baptised Sikhs wear the five K's and adhere fully to the principles of Sikhism in a manner without much flexibility in their practice. Non-Baptised Sikhs may have cut hair, they may have a turban but not be baptised, it is therefore important to note that just because a patient who is Sikh is practising differently to another Sikh, it does not mean that either is wrong, it may simply be owing to the difference between baptised and non-baptised practices.

A model for working out a care plan for a Sikh patient:

1. Ask the patient whether they are baptised Sikh?
What are their specific daily routines they wish to try and maintain whilst in care?
2. Determine whether the medical treatment will affect the five K's?
Whether they consent any changes to the five K's?
3. Ask them who they would like to see for spiritual support? It may be a family member, a priest from their local place of worship or someone else.
4. Let them know that a Sikh chaplain is available where possible.
5. In issues of dispute, contact the Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group for guidance.

PART THREE

SIKHISM THE BASIC CONCEPTS

What is Sikhism?

A way of life and philosophy well ahead of its time when it was founded over 500 years ago. The Sikh religion today has a following of over 20 million people worldwide. Sikhism preaches a message of devotion and remembrance of God at all times, truthful living, equality of mankind, social justice and denounces superstitions and blind rituals. Sikhism is open to all through the teachings of its 10 Gurus enshrined in the Sikh Holy Book and Living Guru, Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Who and What is a Sikh?

The word 'Sikh' in the Punjabi language means 'disciple', Sikhs are the disciples of God who follow the writings and teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus. The wisdom of these teachings in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is practical and universal in their appeal to all mankind.

"I observe neither Hindu fasting nor the ritual of the Muslim Ramadan month; Him I serve who at the last shall save. The Lord of universe of the Hindus, Gosain and Allah to me are one; From Hindus and Muslims have I broken free. I perform neither Kaaba pilgrimage nor at bathing spots worship; One sole Lord I serve, and no other. I perform neither the Hindu worship nor the Muslim prayer; To the Sole Formless Lord in my heart I bow. We neither are Hindus nor Muslims; Our body and life belong to the One Supreme Being who alone is both Ram and Allah for us."
(Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Granth Sahib, Raga Bhairoon pg. 1136)

"Any human being who faithfully believes in: (i) One Immortal Being, (ii) Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh, (iii) The Guru Granth Sahib, (iv) The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and, (v) the baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion is a Sikh."
(Rehat Maryada, Sikh Code of Conduct)

Philosophy and Beliefs

There is only One God. He is the same God for all people of all religions.

The soul goes through cycles of births and deaths before it reaches the human form. The goal of our life is to lead an exemplary existence so that one may merge with God. Sikhs should remember God at all times and practice living a virtuous and truthful life while maintaining a balance between their spiritual obligations and temporal obligations.

The true path to achieving salvation and merging with God does not require renunciation of the world or celibacy, but living the life of a householder, avoiding worldly temptations and sins. Being aware of the divine in our hearts and the whole creation with every breath we take. Earning our living honestly and sharing whatever we have with others. Being constantly awake for opportunities to serve and elevate others.

Sikhism condemns blind rituals such as fasting, visiting places of pilgrimage, superstitions, worship of the dead, idol worship etc.

Sikhism preaches that people of different races, religions, or sex are all equal in the eyes of God. It teaches the full equality of men and women. Women can participate in any religious function or perform any Sikh ceremony or lead the congregation in prayer.

The five Ks

The Five Ks, or panj kakaar/kakke, are five articles of faith that all baptized Sikhs (also called Khalsa Sikhs) are typically obliged to wear at all times as commanded by the tenth Sikh Guru, who so ordered on the day of Vaisakhi in 1699. The symbols are worn for identification and representation of the ideals of Sikhism, such as honesty, equality, fidelity, meditating on God, and never bowing to tyranny. The five symbols are:-

Kesh (uncut hair)

Kangha (wooden comb)

Kachh or Kasherah (cotton breeches or shorts)

Kara (iron bracelet)

Kirpan (strapped sword)

The Guru introduced them for several reasons, these being that adopting these common symbols would identify members of the Khalsa, secondly because all members of the Khalsa wear the 5 Ks the members of the community are more strongly bound together, and thirdly because each K has a particular significance.

Kesh - uncut hair

Throughout history hair (kesh) has been regarded as a symbol both of holiness and strength. One's hair is part of God's creation. Keeping hair uncut indicates that one is willing to accept God's gift as God intended it. Not cutting one's hair is a symbol of one's wish to move beyond concerns of the body and attain spiritual maturity. It is a highly visible symbol of membership of the group. It follows the appearance of Guru Gobind Singh, founder of the Khalsa. Sikh women are just as forbidden to cut any body hair or even trim their eyebrows, as Sikh men are forbidden to trim their beards. A Sikh is not allowed to cut hair from any part of the body.



Kara - a steel bracelet

A symbol of restraint and gentility. A symbol that a Sikh is linked to the Guru. It acts as a reminder that a Sikh should not do anything of which the Guru would not approve. A symbol of God having no beginning or end. A symbol of permanent bonding to the community-being a link in the chain of the Khalsa Sikhs (the word for link is 'kari'). The Kara is made of steel.

Kangha - a wooden comb

This symbolises a clean mind and body; since it keeps the uncut hair neat and tidy. It symbolises the importance of looking after the body which God has created. This does not conflict with the Sikh's aim to move beyond bodily concerns; since the body is one's vehicle for enlightenment one should care for it appropriately.



Kachh or Kashera - special underwear

This is a pair of breeches that must not come below the knee. It's a symbol of chastity.

Kirpan - a ceremonial sword

Kirpa means mercy, and aan means honour. There is no fixed style of Kirpan and it can be anything from a few inches to three feet long. It is kept in a sheath and can be worn over or under clothing.

The Kirpan can symbolise spirituality, the soldier part of the saint-soldier, the defence of good, the defence of the weak, the struggle against injustice.



It is **legal** under the *Criminal Justice Act 1988 (section 139) and Offensive Weapons Act 1996 (section 3 and 4)* for a Sikh to carry a kirpan with a blade for religious reasons (other reasons allowed by the Act are cultural or work related reasons). The Criminal Justice Act 1988 safeguards the rights of Sikhs to carry the kirpan as it is deemed a necessary part of their religion.

Safety issues related to the Kirpan

Sikhs do not perceive the kirpan as a weapon. The kirpan is symbolic rather than functional. The kirpan worn by the majority of Sikhs tends to be approximately 8 inches long, is blunt and is worn sheathed and attached to a cloth belt known as a gatra. Such a kirpan is no more dangerous than a dinner knife and its use in an act of violence is practically unknown. However, there may be rare instances where a patient is wearing a potentially unsafe kirpan, such as one with sharp edges or a pointed tip. It should be discussed with the patient as to the reason why they are wearing this. In cases where there are mental health issues, the family should be consulted to discuss the alternatives and solutions for the patient. As the kirpan is not a weapon but an article of faith, most patients will be willing to discuss the issue in order to come to a pragmatic solution.

Holy days

The main day for Sikhs to go to the gurdwara for worship in Britain is Sunday. This is not for any religious reason, but because Sunday is the day most people in Britain do not work. There are a variety of holy days observed by Sikhs, asking the patient for an up to date calendar will allow a clear indication of when these are. Some may wish to try and visit the gurdwara on such a day for communal worship, if this is possible and feasible, every effort should be made to do this. (In section four, details on how to get an up to date calendar and how to find a local place of worship are given)

A Calendar, known as the Nanakashi Calendar provides dates of all the main religious dates, and has details of each of the 12 religious months which differ from the Western Calendar. Sikhs also see the first day of each month, according to the Sikh calendar as an auspicious day. The key festivals are as follows

- Guru Gobind Singh's birthday (the tenth guru of Sikhs), in January, is celebrated in congregations at Gurdwaras.
- Vaisakhi (or Baisakhi) festival falls in mid-April. It is a celebration of the day that the Khalsa order was created in 1699.
- Martyrdom day of the fifth Sikh Guru Arjan Dev is commemorated in June.
- The enthronement day of Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Scripture) is also celebrated in October.
- Diwali, in October, is a festival of lights and to the Sikhs a reminder of the time when their sixth Guru returned to Amritsar after the Mughal rulers released him from the fort of Gwalior. People exchange gifts and distribute sweets on this day.
- Martyrdom day of the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur is commemorated in November.
- Guru Nanak Dev's birthday (founder of Sikh faith) in November is celebrated and regarded as one of the key dates in the religious calendar.

PART FOUR

FURTHER RESOURCES

For guidance on matters concerning chaplaincy care, the Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group should be approached in the first instance. Details are on the back page of this booklet.

To find your local Sikh community, in order to get other Sikhs to visit or provide pastoral care, using google and searching for “gurdwara” will provide contact information. When calling it is best to ask for the President, or the Secretary. A Sikh priest is also known as a granthi, should one be needed or requested by the patient.

Also a full list of gurdwaras is available at

www.boss-uk.org/gurdwara

or on the Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy website. www.sikhchaplaincy.org.uk

For further information on the Sikh religion, the following websites provide a good starting point:

www.allaboutsikhs.com

www.thesikhdirectory.com

www.sikhiwiki.org

www.sikhnet.com

www.sikhs.org

www.sikhiwiki.org

To find details of Sikh holy days, go to www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/

A glossary of Sikh terms

Akal Purakh: Literally "a timeless being that never dies." A Sikh name for God.

Amrit: Literally "nectar." It is composed of water and sugar and is stirred with a double-edged sword while prayers are spoken. Initiation into Sikhism involves drinking Amrit. Can also refer, more generally, to the ambrosia of God's name.

Amritdhari: A Sikh who has taken part in the ceremonial initiation into the Khalsa.

Ardaas: The Sikh congregational prayer, anonymously written during the 18th century. Although it is not in the Guru Granth Sahib, it occupies a prominent place in Sikh religious functions. It is said with the daily prayers, and often used to initiate or conclude any significant endeavour (i.e. child going away to school, starting a business venture).

Caste: A ranked, birth-ascribed group which determines social standing and occupation, based on the tenets of Hindu philosophy. For Sikhs, caste has no religious or social significance.

Golden Temple: A gurdwara of historical, spiritual, and emotional significance to Sikhs, called Harimandir Sahib in Punjabi. It was first conceived by Guru Amar Das, although construction did not begin until Guru Ram Das became the Guru. In 1604, the compiled Adi Granth was housed here. Later, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the structure plated with gold.

Giani: Someone learned in the Sikh religion. Often leads the congregation in prayers, such as Ardaas, or in singing kirtan.

Granthi: A ceremonial reader of the Guru Granth Sahib. Duties include arranging daily religious services, reading from the Sikh scripture, maintaining the gurdwara premises, and teaching and advising community members. A granthi is not equivalent to a minister as there are no such religious intermediaries in the Sikh religious tradition.

Gurbani: The revealed wisdom of the Sikh Gurus in their own words, found in the Guru Granth Sahib; The devotional songs of the Gurus.

Gurdwara: Literally translated "Home of the Guru." Any building or room dedicated to housing the devotional songs of the Guru for the purpose of spiritual practice. Provides communication, food and shelter help to travellers, and the needy.

Gurmukhi: Literally "from the mouth of the Guru." The written form of Gurbani & Punjabi, used in the Sikh scripture and in contemporary India.

Gurpurab: A historical event in Sikhism to commemorate the birth or passing away of a Sikh Guru.

Gursikh: A Sikh devoted to Waheguru.

Guru: Literally "Human Teacher." One of the most important words in Sikhism, it has a number of related meanings. It can refer, depending on context of usage, to one of the ten Sikh prophets, the Sikh scripture, the Sikh community (Guru Panth), or God. The Sikhs had ten living Gurus, and the 10th Guru transferred the Guruship to the holy scripture, Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Arjan Dev: The fifth Guru of the Sikhs and their first martyr. He compiled the Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708): The tenth and last living prophet of the Sikhs, he passed the guruship onto the Sikh scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, and the Sikh community (Guru Panth / Guru's Path). The term 'Panth' literally meaning community evolved from the term 'Path' referring to the philosophical aspects of Sikhism. Guru Gobind Singh Ji founded the order of the Khalsa during Vaisakhi 1699.

Guru Granth Sahib: The Sikh scripture, written in poetry with each section corresponding to a particular melodic scale, or raag. It is the embodiment of the spiritual knowledge and authority of all the Gurus. The words from the Guru Granth Sahib are the central focus at all Sikh Gurdwaras. It is used by Sikhs for meditation, guidance, comfort, and inspiration.

Guru Hargobind: The 6th Guru of the Sikhs. Following the martyrdom of his father, Guru Arjan Dev Ji, he was the first Guru to maintain a standing army and symbolically wear two swords, representing spiritual and temporal power.

Guru Har Krishan: The 8th Guru of the Sikhs, who was only 5 years old when he became Guru in 1661. He died three years later.

Guru Nanak: The founder of the Sikh faith. Born in 1469, he began his mission by proclaiming that there is "neither Hindu nor Muslim," stressing common truths fundamental to diverse faiths. He preached against caste and advocated the equality of women.

Guru Panth: Literally "Guru's path." The name used by Sikhs to describe the worldwide Sikh community.

Guru Teg Bahadur: The 9th Guru of the Sikhs, who was killed by Mughal rulers in 1675 for defending Hindus facing forcible conversion to Islam.

Kachh or Kashera: Undershorts. One of the five Sikh articles of Utility and faith, given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by a baptized Sikh.

Kangha: Comb. One of the five Sikh articles of utility and faith, given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by a baptized Sikh.

Kara: Steel bracelet. One of the five Sikh articles of utility & faith, given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by a baptized Sikh. Worn as a symbol of devotion

Kaur: Literally "princess." The name given to all female Sikhs.

Kesh: Uncut hair. One of the five Sikh articles of faith, given as gifts of love by GOD & affirmed as such by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by Sikhs.

Khalsa: Literally "belonging only to the divine;" The collective body of all initiated Sikhs, who drink the amrit instituted by Guru Gobind Singh, and agree to live by the highest ideals of Sikh principles. Committed to one's own purity of consciousness and actions.

Khanda: a symbol of the Khalsa.

Kirpan: ceremonial sword. One of the five Sikh articles of faith, given as gifts of love by Guru Gobind Singh, worn by a baptized Sikh. Represents the Sikh commitment to Truth and Protection of the innocent.

Kirtan: The devotional singing of sacred hymns, or shabads, from the Guru Granth Sahib, usually accompanied by instruments.

Langar: Free community kitchen. The devotional meal eaten by the congregation, as part of the religious service. Langar is free and open to all, regardless of religious background. It is an illustration of putting into practice the Sikh belief in the equality of all humanity, and the rejection of the Hindu caste system, which forbade people of different castes from eating together.

Matha taykna: Bowing down and touching the floor with one's forehead in front of the Guru Granth Sahib. Sikhs do not bow before the book as some type of idol worship. By bowing, Sikhs are submitting themselves to the scripture, and the knowledge and true words of God contained therein. Sikhs perform matha taykna as they enter the main hall. Most worshippers opt to place a donation in front of the scripture before bowing, which is used for the management of the gurdwara.

Naam: Name. The divine name of God.

Naam Simran: Remembering God's name through meditation. This is a seminal form of worship for Sikhs.

Nitnem: The daily Sikh prayers.

Panj Piare: "Five beloved ones;" Five Amritdhari Sikhs. Often refers to the first five initiated Sikhs, during the Vaisakhi celebrations of 1699, who volunteered to give up their lives as a sign of their faith and love for their Guru. Currently, panj piare are necessary to perform baptisms and officiate over special occasions.

Panth: The Sikh community.

Punjab: Literally "five rivers." Fertile, agriculturally productive region in South Asia which today is divided between India and Pakistan. Birthplace of the Sikh religious tradition. Name of states in both India and Pakistan.

Rehat Maryada: A formalized code of conduct setup by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru for the Khalsa way of life.

Sangat: Literally translated "community." A Sikh congregation. Believed to be an essential aspect of living a spiritual and God-centered life. Also called Sadh Sangat, "holy congregation".

Sat Sri Akal: A common Sikh greeting, meaning "God is True and Timeless."

Seva: Community service. A central aspect of Sikh theology; Selfless service, which is believed to bring one closer to God.

Shabad: Literally "word." A sacred Sikh hymn from the Sikh scriptures.

Sikh: Literally "student, disciple." According to the Sikh Rehat Maryada, a Sikh is someone who believes in God, the ten Sikh Gurus, in the Guru Granth Sahib, in the importance of the Khalsa initiation, and in no other religion; "Seeker of Truth"

Singh: Literally means lion. The name given to all male Sikhs.

Turban: A cloth covering of the head. Worn as a sign of devotion to God.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh: Traditional Sikh greeting, which means "My Purity belongs to God, My Victory belongs to God."

Waheguru: Literally "the wonderful Lord"; the "Gurmantra" given to Sikhs by Guru Sahib, meant to be recited while meditating.

The Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group provides support to existing and new chaplains in the NHS. Chaplains (also known as Sewaks) are recruited through the group and given training and support for their work. The group also acts in the areas of authorisation, and setting guidelines of best practice for the healthcare of Sikh patients. We are an independent charity (no 1112449) and operate across the United Kingdom.

The Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group

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Published by the Sikh Healthcare chaplaincy group

