

Guidance note on dealing with mental health issues and Sikh patients  
Dealing with mental health issues: Perspectives in Sikhism

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This paper provides some insights into the challenges facing Sikh chaplains with regards to the care of Sikh patients. The paper discusses some of the common issues that arise and goes on to discuss how best these might be dealt with using the Sikh faith.

### **Sikh perspective on mental health**

Mental health should be dealt with as any other illness that occurs in the lifetime of an individual. However, whilst Sikhs are a separate entity, many of their beliefs and practices are not that different from the broader South Asian community. Within this, the key issues that arise is firstly that mental health issues are still seen by many as a taboo subject.

It is regrettable that this view is taken. It causes families to hide or to distort diagnose and in many cases leads to late treatment of issues such as depression. It also runs the risk of creating greater problems through non-treatment. For the young, especially those who are growing up with the stresses and strains of living within two quite distinct cultures, the Sikh culture and Western culture it is not uncommon that depression and other mental health illness are over-looked. For anyone dealing with a Sikh family, the first step should be to explain to them that mental health illnesses can happen to anyone, and can also be treated. Further, it should be explained that it is better in the long run treatment of the illness to have open communication and to discuss with the patients, their family how best to deal with it.

Much debate within families will be on the cause rather than the solution. For those practitioners who find themselves in these situations, the key is to explain that like any other ailment, specialist exist who are trained to deal with these issues and to provide the necessary treatment and support for recovery.

*Enclosed is an article by Dr Iqbal Singh and the Sikh spiritual model of counselling by Kala Singh.*

### **Strategies on supporting mental health patients from the Sikh community**

#### **1. Using a culturally based model of counselling.**

The article attached as part of this pack on the Sikh spiritual model of counselling provides some interesting insights into the faith and of how to develop a model for dealing with mental health issues.

Despite the rich linguistic flexibility of Punjabi, it is telling that we do not have a single term for 'depression.' Often treatment is not sought and if it is sought it is usually terminated early as clients do not feel health professionals understand their world-view. Mental health professionals should use cultural/religious specific models of counselling. As the Sikh religion is a universal religion, this model can be used in conjunction with Western counselling for everyone. There is also great scope for the use of Sikhism in the preventive, promotive and curative aspects of mental health. With all these qualities, the Khalsa (Baptized Sikh) is the ideal future international hope for humanity. The need of the day is to enable these principles to reach mankind all over the world.

## **2. Respecting the daily routine of the patient**

Whilst they may be suffering from mental health issues. Many families feel these then excludes them from prayer, both in a communal setting and also personally. However, at these times this routine is to be encouraged in order to provide the spiritual support to the soul.

## **3. Respecting the five k's**

In cases where baptised Sikhs are suffering from mental health illnesses, the best endeavours should be made to ensure that they are able to maintain their five k's. This involves keeping the hair, wearing the keshara, the kara the kanga and the kirpan. The UK Sikh healthcare chaplaincy group has a separate guidance note on the kirpan given the issues that this can cause in these settings. However, it is of great importance that every endeavour should be made to ensure that the sanctity of the baptised Sikh during this time is not broken.

## **4. Support for the family**

Sikhs have close knit family structures. Whilst one individual may be suffering the likelihood is that this will be having a detrimental effect on parents, siblings and partners. It is important to ensure that they are supported at these times, so as to ensure that they are able to provide a strong support network for the individual concerned.