



A HANDBOOK FOR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Diversity
competent Care
for a Sikh Patient



Diversity. Equity. Inclusion.

This handbook offers understanding the basic principles of Sikh faith and how medical care needs to be in line with Sikh faith and practice when treating Sikh Patients.



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TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction	4
Sikhism	5
Basic Principles	6
Sikh Values	7
Sikh Appearance	8
Patient Rights	9
Treating Sikh patients	10
Articles of faith	11
Sikh beliefs and place of worship	12-14
Preferences and cultural sensitivities	15-17
Additional Resources	18
References	19

INTRODUCTION

Sikhism is a practical way of life. The word Sikh means a disciple, a disciple of one Creator, God (Waheguru). Sikhs have a disciplined life following a code of conduct. The interpretation of Sikh principles and the way they practice it may slightly differ from person to person. It is important to ask each individual, and their family what is important to them, and what is needed to respect their individual values and beliefs during the care giving process.

Healthcare providers must understand that due to immigration and migration, there are large Sikh populations in various areas around the world, including other parts of India (outside of the province of Punjab), parts of Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania), Britain, and the United States. Migration, immigration and settlement patterns have had a large effect on the cultures – values, beliefs, and lifestyles – of these different populations.

SIKHISM

The Sikh religion began in 1469 in Punjab

Founder- Guru Nanak Dev ji

There are over 20 million Sikhs worldwide

Sikhs believe in one God and follow the teachings of 10 Gurus, now Living Guru is Guru Granth Sahib ji (Sikh holy scriptures)

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SIKHISM

Earn

Earn an honest living



Share

Share earnings with others



Meditate

Always remember and meditate on God

SIKH VALUES

Devotion

Remembering God

Truthful living

Equality

Justice

Selfless service

Sharing

Humility

Denounce superstitions and blind rituals

Avoiding worldly temptations



Men and women may have long, uncut hair with a turban.

Hair is considered a gift from God, and so hair becomes a symbol of loving God and respecting everything God has given.

A patient must be consulted and give explicit permission prior to trimming, cutting or shaving any hair from any part of the body (even for routine procedures such as taking blood). The turban is not like a hat, it is considered a crown – respect and privacy must be given for removing or tying it.

PATIENT RIGHTS

Sikhs may or may not have a distinctive appearance or wear all the Articles of Faith. Baptised/Practicing Sikhs (Punjabi word is Amrit dhaari) wear five articles of faith at all times including a sheathed dagger, a wooden comb worn in the hair, uncut hair covered in turban, cotton shorts, and a steel bracelet. Most Sikhs prefer not to remove any of the articles during medical treatment unless it is must for a medical procedure like an MRI or a scan etc. Either way, permission should be sought before removal of any of the articles. If any of the articles of Sikh faith are removed, they should be given to the family members or kept on a high place with respect.

When dealing with a death of a patient following the Sikh faith, articles should still stay with the body. The family and Sikh priest (Granthi) would prepare for funeral as per the Sikh tradition.

TREATING SIKH PATIENTS

Sikhs value medicine and sciences and are not prohibited to receive medical treatment however they do not cut their hair unless there is a medical emergency or life-threatening condition, that requires hair to be shorn to perform a medical procedure. Please note practicing Sikh patients value their hair and hold in high regard their unshorn hair and can become distressed with the news their hair may need to be cut/shaved.

Families and elder people in the family are important and their involvement in the medical treatment for patient must be respected.

Sikhs primary language is Punjabi and most elderly people and new immigrants do not speak English in which case an interpreter with a good grasp on Punjabi language must be made available.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ARTICLES OF FAITH

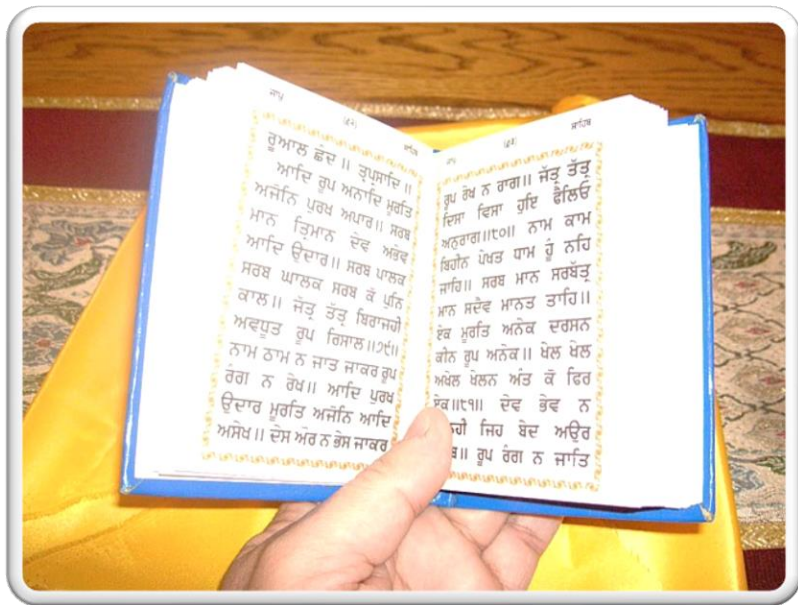
Uncut Hair (Kes) are a symbol of holiness and strength as Sikh follows the appearance of their Guru. Not cutting hair is a symbol of preserving the gift of Creator and attain spiritual maturity.

Steel Bracelet (Kara) as a reminder that Creator is beyond beginning or end, like a circle. It is also a reminder of the Sikh's bond with the Guru.

Wooden Comb (Kangha) to keep hair clean and symbolizes hygiene and ridding oneself of impurities and what is morally undesirable. Sikhs may brush their hair with the kanga (comb) two times a day. Sikhs don't throw their hair in garbage, rather keep them to dispose off respectfully via periodic cremations.

Cotton Shorts (Kashera), a symbol of chastity and sexual morality. The undershorts are worn at all times therefore, patients may request that the undershorts be tied to one of their legs during physical exam or any medical procedure.

Sheathed curved Dagger (Kirpan)- The word Kirpan is a portmanteau composed of Kirpa meaning mercy and aan means honor, carried to defend and protect the weak. Kirpan is also to symbolize fight against injustice. A Kirpan can vary in size from a few inches to a feet.



SIKH BELIEFS

The gutka contains select Sikh scriptures from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It is usually wrapped in a cloth. You may find it by the bedside of patients.

Also, patients may have kindles or e-books with the same respect shown.

If you need to move the gutka, ask the patient or family member. Make sure your hands are clean. The gutka is treated with incredible respect, and should not be put on the floor, near the washroom, or underneath other books/magazines. Sikhs strongly believe in God and pray for themselves and for well-being of others, so they may read the hymns aloud from the gutka.

SIKH BELIEFS- CONTINUED

Sikhs strongly believe in One Creator ('Waheguru') and believe that the birth and death is in Creator's hands. Sikhs also believe in reincarnation. (Sikhs believe that all living beings have an eternal soul which passes through successive cycles of birth and rebirth until the soul once again merges with God, through meditation)

Noble deeds, selfless giving and sacrifice are important teachings of Sikh religion.



The Sikh worship place is called a Gurudwara. The true Guru continues teaching, touching and blessing every heart through His sweet words 'Gurbani' compiled as Sikhs' Holy Scriptures 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji', the living Guru.

'Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji' is at the heart of Sikh worship, and its presence lends sanctity to the Gurudwara, where it is installed on an altar and the devotees pay their obeisance to the Guru. The services at Gurudwara consist of singing of hymns from 'Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji' and sharing meal (langar).

GURUDWARA

FOOD PREFERENCES

Sikhs that are baptized and practicing the faith have strict dietary beliefs usually

- No egg, meat, fish, alcohol
- No cigarettes
- No illicit drugs
- Dairy products are ok

Ingredients and additives such as gelatin, enzymes (animal rennet), fish oil etc. that may be found in some foods could make them unsuitable for Sikhs.

A family member or friend may bring “parshaad”, a sacramental food that is made in the Gurdwara or home (made of sugar, flour, and clarified butter), to the patient. If eating this food is medically contraindicated, please let the family or patient know, or suggest adjustments (e.g., eating only a small amount)

Please have a conversation with patient to determine their personal dietary needs and restrictions.



CULTURAL SENSITIVITIES

Sikh patients may prefer and request the treatment from the same gender healthcare provider, which should be respected whenever possible.

Daily bathing, early morning prayer (Nitnem), evening prayer (Rehraas Sahib) and bedtime prayer (Kirtan Sohila) and meditation are part of the Sikh way of life and accommodations should be made during Sikh patients' prayer time whenever possible.

Transplants, organ donation and blood transfusions are permitted. Abortion and Circumcision are not permitted. These medical decisions are always the patient's individual choice.

Some are not comfortable with vaccines with egg-based technology or other technologies due to the cell lines.

The decisions that a Sikh patient makes are their own decisions, but each person practices the Sikh faith to the extent they feel comfortable with, and you may encounter differences from patient to patient.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINES AND REMEDIES

Sikhs may use a variety of traditional medicines and remedies, often in conjunction with herbs and plant products, in addition to traditional treatments such as Ayurveda, Homeopathy and Yoga. These treatments traditionally played an important role in treating illnesses in India and continue to be used today, including in communities in foreign countries.

Sikhs recite and listen to Gurbani (sacred hymns- words uttered by Sikh Gurus and enshrined in the Holy Scriptures- Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji) and pray for their physical and spiritual well-being as well as for the well-being of whole world (Sarbat da bhala).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Basics of Sikhi

<https://www.basicsofsikhi.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/@basicsofsikhi>

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20



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