

Caring for Muslim Patients

Edited by Aziz Sheikh and Abdul Rashid Gatra

People of Muslim faith are now a considerable and significant minority in our multi-ethnic, culturally diverse society. Doctors and other health workers in many areas find that they are treating patients whose beliefs and religious ideas they do not begin to understand or recognise. And Muslim patients find themselves treated with insensitivity or even hostility when they try to explain (perhaps without sufficient English) their reasons for being unable to follow the doctor's well meant advice.

This well written and user-friendly book will do a great deal to help us to understand and empathise with our Muslim patients. It begins with an overview of the demographics of the Muslim people in Britain, their aspirations and achievements and the difficulties which face them as a result of prejudice. The next three chapters provide an excellent introduction to the Muslim 'grand narrative'; we are told about the history of Islam, the central tenets of the faith (the Five Pillars), the daily practice and the Muslim view of the human condition in health and sickness. We learn that 'a healthy heart' implies a healthy spiritual state which is even more important than clear coronary arteries. Above all we come to realise that the teachings of Islam are not only spiritually uplifting; they are also

kindly, humane, and reasonable: Muhammed himself is remembered as someone who 'smiled more than any man'. All this is refreshingly different from the distorted and paranoid view of Islam which we get from the tabloids.

The second half of the book deals with Muslim attitudes, beliefs and practices in many areas which will be important for patients and their doctors. There are chapters covering the family, birth customs, fasting in Ramadan, the pilgrimage of Hajj (for which a helpful revision of travel medicine is provided) and lastly death and bereavement. The concluding chapter discusses how essential it is for us to break down barriers and connect with our fellow human beings with different cultures and faiths. There are some useful appendices and a glossary.

I enjoyed the book greatly and found much of it deeply moving. As a result of reading it I feel much closer to my Muslim patients; and I hope they feel that I am understanding them a little better.

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