

Monday 18 March 2019 10:00hrs

Important information for all GP teams, Community Pharmacists, Community Nursing and Aged Care Facilities – Please share this with everyone in your team

- We acknowledge the trauma that Christchurch Muslim communities, our Muslim colleagues and friends have experienced on Friday the 15th of March. Our deep condolences go to all affected. Our responses to the intense and complex nature of the grief in our Muslim communities need to be thoughtful and culturally sensitive.
- We recognise all staff and patients are likely to be impacted by Friday's events, which for some may bring back previous anxiety and negative feelings.
- This update is to provide you with some information that might be helpful to support staff and affected patients.

Supporting patients from our Muslim Communities

- Be aware that some Muslim patients:
 - May feel unsafe leaving the house, including coming to practices or other health services.
 - May not seek help for mental health due to internalised stigma.
 - May be further traumatised by delays in the burial and appropriate ceremonies (due to police involvement).
- Consider:
 - Offering home visits to Muslim patients, if appropriate and desirable for the patient.
 - Contacting your Muslim patients to enquire about their well-being.
- See attached overview of Muslim religion in regards to death, dying and burials.

Primary Care Resources

- Pastoral care for General Practice and Pharmacy teams is available.
 - Pharmacists can access counselling through Pharmacy Defence Association.
 - General Practice staff members who have been personally affected by the event and who require assistance can contact Simon Wynn Thomas
Simonwynn-thomas@pegasus.org.nz
- PHOs are working closely with practices which serve a large Muslim, refugee or migrant community. If you feel your practice population falls into this group and you will require additional support please contact your PHO.
- ACC covers all people who were injured in Friday's events regardless of immigration status, and also some services for immediate family members.
<https://www.acc.co.nz/about-us/news-media/latest-news/christchurch/>
- Funding for additional costs of consultations for patients who are directly affected by this event (e.g., family member involved) will be fully subsidised over the next two weeks. Please keep a record of these consultations and claims information will follow.
- Primary mental health services and the CDHB will be working to support practices and patients over the coming weeks
- The following links/resources might also be helpful for acute counselling or support:
 - National Telehealth service - Call or text 1737 anytime for free counselling from a trained counsellor
 - Patient information aimed at children and young people about coping with a terrorist event https://www.skylight.org.nz/search/results?topic_ids%5B%5D=124
 - Victim Support <http://www.victimsupport.org.nz/> or phone 0800VICTIM
 - Interpreting services <https://canterbury.communityhealthpathways.org/29346.htm>

Kind regards,

Drs Phil Schroeder and Kim Burgess
Canterbury Primary Response Group

www.primaryhealthresponse.org.nz



All Right? Psychosocial Messaging – Christchurch Terror Attack

Normalising our reactions

- A lot of us are feeling on edge and upset right now – this is a completely normal reaction
- Disasters and big shocks take a toll on all of us and coping is not always easy.
- During scary or surprising events, our brains react by releasing adrenaline. This response is our natural alarm system – our body telling us to be alert and ready for action. It's there to help us, but afterwards we can feel shaky, queasy or on-edge, and that's totally normal.

Looking after ourselves and each other

- There are small things we can do to look after ourselves and others, even when times are tough.
 - Be kind to one another. Kindness is contagious, and boosts endorphins.
 - Take a digital detox, and focus on an activity you love. Reading, games with the kids, or a short walk.
 - Spend time with people you love - we all need each other. Talk about how your feeling
 - Focus on the things you can control

Supporting our kids and whānau

- Children take their cues of parents — so if you're okay, they'll be okay too...
- Be mindful how much 'worry' you're displaying, just be as cool as you can!
- Keep children away from the media.
- Answer their questions pretty matter of factly and in very 'general' terms. Drama it down. You don't have to get the answers exactly right here. Ensure you talk too about the police and how they did a really good job of keeping us safe. Keep the reassurance low key too — over-reassuring can make us think we need to be worrying more than we are!
- Let them talk about it, but don't let it 'take over' - use distraction to keep their mind off it - we've got the board games out!
- Stick to your normal routines as much as you can.

In the words of our good friends at The Worry Bug:

- "Reassure them that the world hasn't changed, this is an unusual situation and things will go back to normal soon. When you listen you don't need to solve, you just need to listen and be empathic. Feelings usually retreat after a short while if they are listened to and acknowledged."

For parents of teens...

- Try and keep them off or away from the social media as much as you can, but it's okay if they need to have it on tap right now – it can be a great way for them to be checking in with friends and supporting each other.
- Let them know there's a lot of hype out there.
- Say that you're sticking with credible sources of information as they report only the things released by the police and people actually 'in the know'. If they are really affected by this 'hype' tell them it's time to put the phone down or away. Keep the reassurance low key too.

For schools

- In the week starting 18 March All Right? will be promoting free [Sparklers wellbeing activities](#) that promote kindness, friendships and strengths in a classroom setting
- All Right? will also be sharing Sparklers activities that focus on [understanding emotions and managing worries](#)

Support is available

- Traumatic events affect each of us differently, and we all need a bit of support from time-to-time. If you or someone you know is struggling, there is free help available. Free call or text 1737 any time, 24 hours a day. You can also call Lifeline on 0800 543354 or text HELP to 4357.

Muslim

Islam – literally, ‘peace through surrendering to the will of God’ – is the faith of more than 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, including more than thirty thousand in New Zealand.

New Zealand Muslims have come from many countries – India, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, Fiji, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan, the former Yugoslavia, and others. There are now many New Zealand-born Muslims – the children and grandchildren of earlier migrants, as well as indigenous New Zealand Muslims, both Māori and Pākehā. Over the years, Islamic centres and mosques have been established in many New Zealand cities to meet their diverse needs.

When Muslims gather for worship, differences of nationality and ethnicity are unimportant: all are as one within the mosque. Classical Arabic is the language of prayer and of the Islamic holy book, the Qur’an (Koran). However, within the overall framework of Islam, Muslims can and do observe their own cultural practices. For example, while Islam teaches a resigned, dignified acceptance of death, some Muslim cultures are very expressive in the way they mourn, wailing and tearing at their clothes. But where cultural practices conflict with religious practice, they are regarded as *bid’ah* (innovations without basis in the Koran or the tradition of the prophet Muhammad), and religion should take precedence.

There are five pillars that are central to Islam: faith in God, praying five times daily, giving a proportion of one’s wealth in charity, fasting during daylight hours in the month of *Ramadan*, and making a pilgrimage to the holy city of Makkah (Mecca). There are other important laws. For example, Muslims do not drink alcohol or eat pork, and all other meat must be *halal*-killed. They are required to dress modestly. For women, this requirement is interpreted in various ways: some wear Western dress, others cover just their heads, and some cover their faces as well, when outside the home.

Approaching death

In Islam, death is part of God’s plan, and it is a Muslim’s duty to accept it as God’s will. Those mourning a loved one are encouraged to see it as a temporary separation, as everyone will be reunited in the afterlife. Muslims are taught to be prepared to face death at any time: this is one reason why the daily ritual of prayer is so important, as it enables people to regularly atone for their sins and seek God’s forgiveness.

With regard to medical treatment, the supreme sanctity of life takes precedence over everything else. For example, Muslims may take medicine that contains alcohol if they would die otherwise. However, where there is a choice, Muslims would always prefer treatments that do not violate Islamic law.

The daily ritual of prayer remains vitally important when a Muslim is dying, even though the seriously ill are technically exempt. Fellow Muslims helping to care for the dying also need to pray throughout the day: it is appreciated if hospitals can make a prayer mat or private room available. Prayers are said facing Mecca (north-west from New Zealand), and it is essential to wash before praying.

As death approaches, family and friends surround the dying person and recite verses from the Koran that help the person to focus on the afterlife. Although it is not necessary for an imam to be called at this stage, some families may request it. The very last words a Muslim says or hears are often the statements of faith: *la ilaha illallah* ('there is no god but God') and *Muhammadur Rasulullah* ('Muhammad is the messenger of God'). Even if the dying person is no longer able to speak, everyone present recites these words audibly and in Arabic, regardless of their mother tongue.

Sometimes, hospital staff may encounter a dying Muslim patient who is not affiliated with a particular mosque, but would still like fellow Muslims to be present. The local mosque or Islamic centre should be contacted, and members of the community will be happy to visit and support the patient. Among migrant groups, where a dying person may have few extended family members in New Zealand, the wider community willingly takes on their role.

Preparing for the funeral

Preparing the body of a fellow Muslim for burial is an important duty. Muslim communities in New Zealand tend to make all the necessary arrangements themselves, including providing the coffin (which is reused, as most bodies are buried without them) and transporting the body to the cemetery. Often, all that is required from a funeral director is a suitable place for the body to be prepared and to lie before burial.

In death, a person is treated with the same respect they would receive while alive. The body is handled gently and modestly: women are prepared for burial by other Muslim women, and men by Muslim men. The body is washed and perfumed, either at the hospital or at a funeral home. It is then dressed in a plain white shroud comprising three pieces of cloth for men and five for women. The uniformity of the shroud is very significant:

From the earth We have created you
and unto the earth We shall return you
and from it, again,
We will resurrect you once again.

Koran, Taha: 55

Islam believes that a person's wealth or status is of no importance in the next world.

Islam requires that burial takes place as soon as possible after death. In many Islamic countries, this means within twenty-four hours, but this is seldom possible in New Zealand. Where burial must be delayed because of a post-mortem or coroner's inquiry, Muslim families may be distressed, but will accept it as the law of the land.

From the time a death is announced, the bereaved family will be supported and comforted by their community. People gather round, helping with food and other practical matters, and joining the family in prayer and readings from the Koran. While acknowledging the family's great loss, fellow Muslims may also console them with the thought that their loved one is now closer to God.

Burying the dead

Muslims regard participating in a funeral – carrying the coffin, reciting prayers at the graveside, comforting the family – as an honour and a privilege. Before the burial, mourners say the funeral prayer or *salatul janaza*, which asks God to forgive the deceased their sins, and grant them a life of bliss in the next world.

Muslims are always buried: cremation is not permitted in Islam. Coffins are not normally used. The shrouded body is placed, facing Mecca, in a chamber dug at the base of the grave or to one side. The chamber is sealed with a wooden board so that no earth rests directly on the body.

An imam or other pious Muslim places the first three handfuls of earth in the grave, reciting a prayer after each. Then all mourners follow suit. A tombstone may be placed on the grave by relatives, but this is an individual choice.

The same burial service and funeral prayers are usually conducted for infants and stillborn babies.

Although suicide is considered a sin in Islam, normal burial arrangements are usually followed. However, the imam may choose not to lead the prayers.

Islam teaches that in such situations, people are not in a position to judge others: the dead will be judged by God alone.

Beyond death

After the funeral, mourners often gather at the family home and the imam will speak. The focus is not so much on the deceased and their achievements, but on the significance of death. While acknowledging the mourners' grief and loss, the imam urges them to be resigned and patient, knowing that God's will has been done. He counsels them against anger or bitterness, and reminds them that God tests people by giving life and by taking it away.

Although Islam does not specify a set mourning period, individual cultures may observe certain stages. Ideally, the mourning period should not last for more than three days. During this period, the bereaved family usually gathers with friends and community members to recite the Koran and ask for forgiveness for the departed soul. Food may or may not be served; the primary aim is to remember the deceased, and to reflect on the reality of death.

Muslims are taught that the stronger their faith, the easier it is for them to resume normal life after the death of a loved one. It is the responsibility of friends and family to comfort and support the bereaved during this time, with the aim of helping them to carry on as normal.

Information sources: Sheikh Mohammed Amir; Rehanna Ali; 'Death in Islam' by H. S. Adam (from The Undiscover'd Country).