



Health care providers' handbook on

Muslim patients

Second edition



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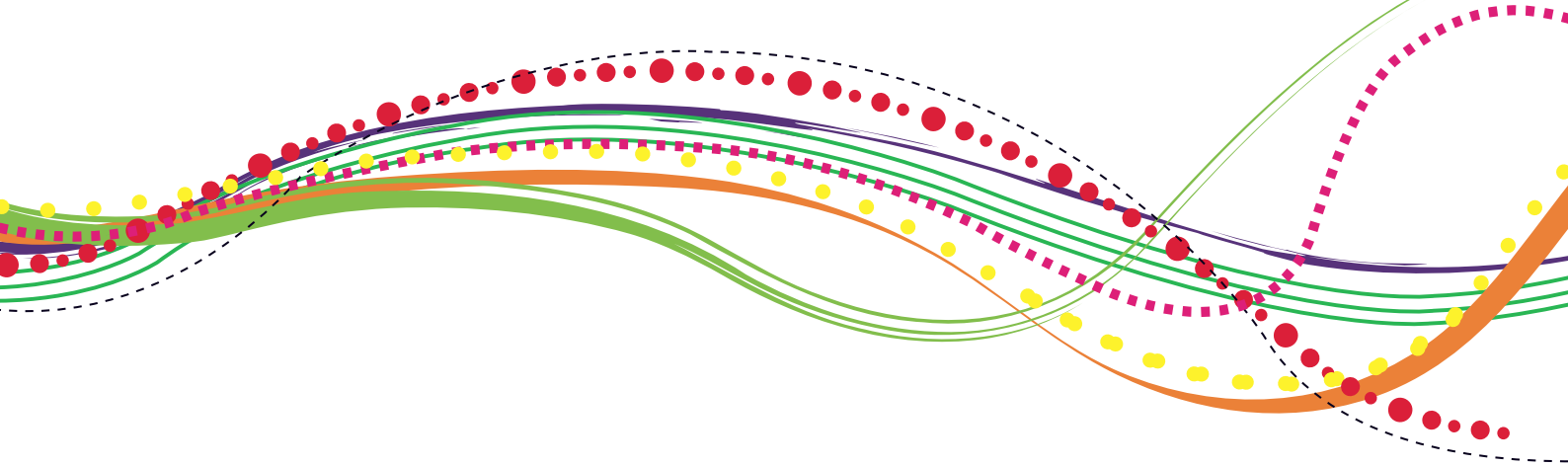


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Preface

In 1996, Queensland Health and the Islamic Council of Queensland published the **Health Care Providers' Handbook on Muslim Patients** as a quick-reference tool for health workers when caring for Muslim patients. The handbook aimed to help health care providers understand the religious beliefs and practices of Muslims that could affect health care, and provided health care advice and resources.

This second edition of the handbook updates and expands on the topics covered in the original guide. The handbook has three sections:

- Guidelines for health services
- Islamic beliefs affecting health care
- Additional resources.

Each section provides practical advice and information for health care providers, which is designed to answer some of the more common questions about Muslim patients and the religious practices of Islam which affect health care. The handbook also provides links to further information and contacts within the Islamic community of Queensland.

Health care providers work in an increasingly diverse environment. Those who display cross-cultural capabilities in their work use self-reflection, cultural understanding, contextual understanding, communication and collaboration to provide culturally appropriate, responsive and safe health care¹. The handbook aims to support health care providers by building their knowledge of the needs of Muslim patients.

The second edition of the **Health Care Providers' Handbook on Muslim Patients** was written under the guidance of an advisory committee comprising:

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¹ The Queensland Health Cross-Cultural Capabilities are: self-reflection, cultural understanding, context, communication and collaboration. Refer to www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural



Introduction

Queensland is a culturally and religiously diverse state – in 2006 nearly one in five Queenslanders (17.9 per cent) was born overseas, 7.8 per cent of the population spoke a language other than English at home, and more than 129,000 people followed a religion other than Christianity. Between 2001 and 2006, the two fastest growing religions in Queensland were Hinduism and Islam. Figures from the 2006 census show there are more than 20,000 Muslims living in Queensland. Anecdotal information and community feedback indicate that the true figure is likely to be significantly higher.

The increasing cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the Queensland population means that to be safe, health services need to be culturally appropriate and responsive. Research indicates a strong link between cultural incompetence, and poor quality health outcomes and significant risks².

Personal level of adherence

Islam is a universal religion which is practiced in almost all countries around the world. A follower of Islam is called a Muslim.

As Islam places responsibility on the individual to practice his or her religion, there are personal and cultural variations that make it difficult to provide definitive rules and regulations that apply to all Muslim patients. A Muslim from West Africa may have a slightly different way of observing Islam when compared to a Muslim from Bosnia, Indonesia or Iran.

Because of these personal and cultural variations, it is important that health care providers consult the patient about their personal level of religious observance.

However, Muslim patients should not be regarded as a ‘special’ group that require additional attention from health care providers. Due to the Islamic belief that all events, including health events, are the will of God, Muslim patients may be more likely to display acceptance of difficult circumstances and be compliant with the instructions of health care providers.

Preservation of life

Although there are many variations in how Islam is practiced, there is one requirement that is common to all Muslims – **the preservation of life overrides all guidelines, rules and restrictions**. While health care providers should endeavour to provide treatment that does not conflict with religious practices, in life-threatening situations, Islam allows exceptions to its rules.

² Johnstone, Megan-Jane and Kanitsaki Olga (2005) Cultural Safety and Cultural Competence in Health Care and Nursing: An Australian Study, RMIT University, Melbourne.