



**CONFIDENTIAL**

The holiday season can be especially stressful for those in the medical profession. When coping with all the demands on your time begins to affect your relationships at home or at work, you don't have to tough it out alone. The free, confidential Resident Assistance Program Hotline, (813) 870-3344, offered by Wood & Associates is as close as your phone.

## Sensitivity to Cultural, Religious Differences Essential at Holiday Time

Holiday traditions and religious beliefs can affect the way a patient responds to medical treatment and advice. While it may take a little extra time to learn what a patient's beliefs are, especially if they are different from your own, it's always worthwhile.

"A physician must always ask about a patient's religious and cultural background and also what the patient wants and needs," says Vincent Ober, M.D., clinical assistant professor, University of Florida Department of Community Health and Family Medicine. "The biggest mistake is not asking and assuming all patients have similar orientations."

### Unrecognized Beliefs Can Present Challenges

One surprising illustration is the case of a psychiatric patient who uncharacteristically became disruptive during Halloween celebrations at the facil-

ity. When the problem became more than they could handle, the staff called in Patricia N. Alexander, Ph.D., a Licensed Mental Health Counselor. In talking with the patient, Dr. Alexander learned that she was a Jehovah's Witness and did not celebrate Halloween and had in fact never done so. After explaining this to the staff, they apologized to the patient and did not insist she join in the activities.

### Taking Religious Observances into Consideration

Certain religious beliefs can affect a patient's compliance with medical instruction, says Dr. Ober, who also chairs Shands Jacksonville's Ethics Committee. Something as simple as recommending a low-sodium diet for a Jewish patient could be a problem, he says, "since there is no low sodium kosher diet."

It's essential for doctors and health care staff to be familiar with dietary constraints that may be imposed by a person's faith or culture. Muslims, for example, fast from sunup to sundown during the month of

Ramadan, which could pose a serious compliance issue should they need to be placed on a special diet.

Religious beliefs can cause compliance issues involved when prescribing medication as well, Ober adds. "Some medications are not acceptable—contracep-

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"Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself.

Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections, but instantly set about remedying them—every day begin the task anew."

- St. Francis de Sales

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patricianaalexander@earthlink.net



## Money Matters

Want to make your holidays happier and financially healthier? Start planning now by taking a holiday inventory to analyze your gift list, holiday budgets from previous years, and your family's holiday traditions. Decide what traditions are most important to you and your family and what things you could eliminate to save yourself time and money. Keep in mind that holidays should be a time of peace and joy. Be sure you are doing things that make you feel good rather than cause you stress and worry.

After analyzing your past holiday habits, create a plan for this year. Set a goal for the holiday and then decide how you will go about achieving that goal. If sharing your holiday with someone in need is important, then set that as your goal. You might volunteer to serve a holiday meal at a shelter or provide a gift for a needy child. If you decide to spend less time in the kitchen and spend more time with your family this holiday, consider purchased baked goods and a catered holiday meal. If your goal is to spend less money on gifts, you might be able to give hand-made gifts or simply cut down your gift list.

Whatever your goal is for this holiday, it should *relieve* some of the stress that we have placed upon ourselves during the season and *renew* some of the joy that the season entails.

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## Sensitivity to Holidays, Beliefs Essential

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tives or antidepressants, for example—because of religious or cultural beliefs about the cause and treatment of the problem.”

### Encouraging Sensitivity Year Round

Hospitals are becoming more attuned to the importance of the religious and spiritual needs of patients, their families and hospital employees.

For questions about how people of a particular faith celebrate holidays, your hospital chaplain may be a good first resource. The Web has a wealth of information on cultural diversity and holiday celebrations as well.

By learning how patients celebrate—or don't celebrate—certain holidays, you'll improve your ability to communicate clearly and avoid misunderstandings that can affect a patient's care.

### Eating Taboos

Since food and holidays are so closely linked, it's important to be sensitive to any diet restrictions patients may have because of their faith or culture.

- Catholics, on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, may abstain from eating meat.
- Hindus don't eat beef.
- Hindus, Muslims, Mormons, and some Protestant sects do not drink alcoholic beverages.
- Jews who observe Passover are forbidden to eat any baked goods or cereal products that could ferment (bread or dough).
- Jews and Muslims who observe the dietary codes don't eat pork or fish without scales or fins. In addition, Jews will not eat foods that are not kosher or not prepared under kosher conditions.
- Navajos don't eat fish.
- Seventh Day Adventists don't eat meat.

*Source:  
www.diversityresources.com*

### Holiday Calendar

*(a few of the holidays celebrated during November and December)*

- 11/26** Day of Covenant (Baha'i)
- 11/28** Anniversary of the Ascension of Abdu'i-Baha (Baha'i)
- 11/28** Thanksgiving Day
- 11/30 – 12/7** Hanukkah (Jewish)
- 12/6** Eid Al-Fitr (Islamic)
- 12/8** Bodhi Day (Enlightenment of the Buddha) (Buddhist)
- 12/8** Immaculate Conception (Roman Catholic)
- 12/24** Christmas Eve
- 12/25** Christmas Day
- 12/25** Nativity of Christ (Eastern Orthodox)
- 12/25** Christmas (Protestant)
- 12/25** Christmas (Roman Catholic)
- 12/26** Kwanzaa
- 12/31** New Year's Eve

### Other Web Resources on Cultural Diversity and Holidays

*www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub  
www.diversityconnection.com  
www.education-world.com/a\_sites/sites067.shtml*