

Fasting and Caring: Looking after yourself and your patients during Ramadan

Fasting is an integral part of religious life, discipline and an experience of every faith. Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. For Muslims, Ramadan is a very spiritual month; it is a month of special blessings, love and care for others. During this month, Muslims around the globe will be fasting and showing extra kindness to those who are less fortunate. As well as becoming more God-conscious, which results in suppressing the desires for food, drink and sexual activity, staying hungry will build empathy for those less fortunate who go days without food. This empathy will motivate the fasting person to take extra steps in looking after loved ones by supporting them in times of need.

Students on placements from the Faculty of Health & Wellbeing are fortunate to be awarded these kinds of opportunities in the month of Ramadan. Their passion to care for others will increase due to their fasting, which will benefit society to become more sympathetic and caring towards the weak.

Although students often have no previous healthcare experience and placement is a challenging time, many Muslim students and staff will see fasting as an obligation, not a choice. They must comply with the various codes of practice regarding health and patient safety as well as adhere to the prescribed religious observances.

We understand that if students are fasting and working long hours, it may have an impact on health and safety regulations. We want to make sure that we can be supportive of our students who fast, but also want to ensure their safety and the safety of the patients in their care.

Therefore, the University of Central Lancashire has agreed to the following guidelines for Muslim students who are observing the fasts during their placements.

Practical guidelines for students on placement during Ramadan

1. Determine the dates of Ramadan and let your academic advisor/clinical mentor know that you will be fasting. You can find the estimated Ramadan and Eid dates in the Oasis Faith and Spirituality Centre.
2. Try and be disciplined about your eating and sleeping habits during Ramadan. You have a duty to ensure that you are alert and able to fulfil your role safely.
3. Drink plenty of fluid between *iftaar* (breaking the fast and evening meal) and *suhoor* (pre-dawn meal) to keep your body hydrated throughout the day. Severe dehydration can lead to passing out and potential harm to oneself or even others. The safety and wellbeing of your patients is paramount whilst in your care.

4. Try to arrange the canteen at your placement or any other suitable space for you and other Muslims to break their fast. Invite your peers/colleagues to break the fast with you.
5. Discuss with your placement manager/clinical mentor about the availability of a quiet and private space for you to pray. Most hospitals will have a multi-faith centre you can visit.
6. Please bear in mind that the person who supervises your placement will have several different and often competing priorities and it may not be possible to grant your requests. For this reason, you should give your supervisor as much prior notice as possible for any reasonable adjustments to your placement during Ramadan.
7. Students who are ill or pregnant should seek medical and religious advice before fasting. The Imaam/chaplain at the University can be consulted to help make decisions about individual cases.

Practical guidelines for staff in Ramadan

1. Establish the dates of Ramadan. You can find the estimated Ramadan and Eid dates in the Oasis Faith and Spirituality Centre.
2. Ideally, it is preferable for Muslims not to be around food e.g. having working lunches during Ramadan.
3. Some Muslims may feel they are unable to perform this religious obligation. There are individuals who will be exempt from fasting due to illness, travelling, etc. As a result, for these people, it is essentially a personal decision after the pronouncement by an Imaam/chaplain based on the criteria set by Islamic teachings.
4. Many Muslims increase their worship during Ramadan. A quiet and private space to pray is often much appreciated. If available, please let the student know about any quiet worship or multi-faith centres that are on site.
5. Where possible, consider allowing Muslim students to take a break at sunset for *iftaar* (breaking the fast and evening meal) and prayer.
6. Where possible, consider arranging a suitable space for Muslim students to break their fasts and have their evening meal.
7. As per Islamic teachings, and recent scientific research, a siesta is highly beneficial for the body and mind. If the placement is in a hospital, expect the Muslim students to take some rest time during their lunch break since they will not be eating. This means Muslim students may prefer to make use of any quiet rooms available rather than sitting in the staff tea room.
8. It will be helpful for Muslim students to be exempt from evening functions or significant travel away from home during Ramadan unless necessary for the purposes of their placement.
9. If possible, where the working pattern is during the night, consider allowing Muslim students some time for Taraweeh (late night prayers).

10. Anticipate and, if possible, facilitate requests from students for time-off at the end of Ramadan.

Please note that some hospitals and other medical centres may already have a policy in place for their employees who wish to fast in Ramadhan.

FAQ's on Health Issues whilst Fasting

The following are frequently asked questions by Muslim patients who are fasting:

Blood Tests

Question: If blood is drawn from the body, does this break the fast?

Answer: Drawing blood does not invalidate the fast.

Flu Jab

Question: Can one receive a Flu Jab whilst Fasting?

Answer: Yes, it is permissible. It will not invalidate the fast.

Injections

Question: Is it permissible to have an injection while fasting and will it nullify the fast?

Answer: Yes, it is permissible to take an injection during fasting. This will not nullify the fast.

However, there is a difference of opinion on nutritional injections.

Question: While fasting, I went for a CT scan. I was informed that I would not have to take anything orally for this procedure. However, I was given some medicine through IV. Did this invalidate my fast?

Answer: No, the fast is still valid.

Pregnancy

Question: I am a midwife and see many Muslim patients who, during their pregnancy in the month of Ramadan, are fasting despite being advised not to. Is there any Islamic advice I can use to convince these patients?

Answer: If fasting does not have any adverse medical effects on the patient and the unborn child, then one should allow the patient to fast along with explaining the safest way of doing so. However, if fasting does have adverse medical effects on either, then the patient should be discouraged from fasting highlighting points from a medical perspective. Generally, religious leaders say pregnant women should avoid fasting in the long summer days as it may put the health of their unborn child at risk.

For more information on what nullifies the fast and what does not, please visit

<https://nawaader.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/what-nullifies-the-fast-and-what-does-not2.pdf>

Exemptions

Question: Who is exempt from fasting in the month of Ramadan?

Answer: The following are exempt from fasting:

1. Children under the age of 12 years
2. A traveller
3. A woman who is pregnant
4. A woman who is breast feeding
5. A Diabetic
6. A severely ill person
7. A person with an Incurable disease i.e. HIV infection
8. A person with chronic disease i.e. diabetes, COPD

Please note that some of the people listed above will be required to make up for their fasts on other days when they regain their full health. Please consult the Imaams/chaplains at the University if they fall in this category.

Further information about Ramadan

1) British Nutrition Foundation on a healthy Ramadan:

<https://www.nutrition.org.uk/healthyliving/seasons/ramadan.html>

2) The ACAS guide on key workplace considerations for employers during Ramadan:

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=4868>

3) Working Muslim Guide on guidance for employees:

<https://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/about-dmu-documents/equality-and-diversity/equality-information-january-2012/theworkingmusliminramadan.pdf>

4) NHS Guidance on a Healthier Ramadan:

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130105045807/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_078408.pdf

5) Diabetes UK on managing diabetes during Ramadan:

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/Guide-to-diabetes/Managing-your-diabetes/Ramadan>

<http://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Ramadan-and-diabetes-A-guide-for-patients-2013.pdf>

Further information, advice or support

Students and staff are welcome to contact the Imaam/chaplain should they require further information or support in Ramadhan:

Imam Vasiyyullah Bhayat Muslim Chaplain	01772 892602 VBhayat@uclan.ac.uk
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Guidance prepared in consultation with Muslim students and staff of UCLan and with the help of Higher Education Muslim Chaplains of the North West.

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