

Fasting and Caring - Looking after yourself and your patients during Ramadan: guidance for health care students

We recognise that many Muslim students undertaking health care disciplines have dual obligations to comply with the various codes of practice regarding health and patient safety and to adhere to prescribed religious observances, specifically periods of fasting. We fully appreciate that many people will see fasting as an obligation, not a choice and to that end have consulted with a range of religious leaders from Manchester and across the UK to help inform this practical guide for students.

The impetus for the guidance arose from genuine concerns raised from within the student body regarding the maintenance of their own health and the safety of their patients whilst engaging in practice learning during Ramadan. If students are fasting and working long hours this may impact on their health and safety and potentially the health and safety of those in their care.

We understand that fasting is an integral part of religious life, discipline and experience in every faith. We want to make sure that we can be supportive of our students who fast but also want to ensure the safety of our students and of the patients in their care.

Therefore, the University of Manchester in conjunction with Islamic students' society and Muslim chaplains have agreed the following guidelines for Muslim students and staff during Ramadan:

Quick tips for students on placement in Ramadan:

1. Establish when Ramadan is approaching and let your Academic Advisor/Clinical tutor know that you will be fasting.
2. Try to be disciplined about your eating and sleeping habits when you are not fasting. As a student pursuing studies at the University, you are expected to be alert and for the sake of patients, you have a duty to ensure that you are alert and able to enact your role safely.
3. Where possible avoid committing yourself to evening functions or to significant travel away from home unless it is essential to your placement.
4. Discuss with your Mentor/Practice Supervisor or Lead the possibility of not having working lunches.
5. Ask the person who supervises your placement if there is a quiet and private space where you can pray.
6. Hydrate well during the night and at ***suhour (pre-dawn meal)*** and after ***iftar (evening meal)*** so that you do not get dehydrated while you are on placement/working. Severe dehydration can lead to people passing out and potentially hurting themselves and others.
7. If your placement has a canteen, try to arrange for it [or another space] to be available for you and other Muslims wishing to break their fast. Invite your peers/colleagues to break the fast with you.
8. Ask the placement Supervisor or Lead if they can schedule very physically demanding tasks for you after Ramadan
9. The care of patients must be paramount. If you find that your ability to care for your patients is impaired by your fasting, again, you should seriously consider not fasting on those days.
10. Enquire via your Academic Advisor/ Programme Director if it may be possible for you to request to take between 1-3 days holiday at the end of Ramadan for Eid. In some schools, it may be possible for you to negotiate and make these days up when others are away for Bank Holidays, such as Christmas or New Year Holidays. In other schools, it may not be possible for any time off to be allowed if the clinical/learning experience cannot be reproduced at another time.
11. Please bear in mind that the person who supervises your placement will have a number of 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 notice as possible of any requests to make changes to your placement during Ramadan.

12. Students who are ill, pregnant, or travelling far distances should think very carefully and seek medical and spiritual advice before fasting at all.

Quick tips for staff in Ramadan

1. Establish when Ramadan is approaching.
2. It is preferable for Muslims not to be around food e.g. working lunches during Ramadan.
3. Not all Muslims will feel able to partake in this religious obligation. As mentioned above there are exceptions for people who are ill and who feel they would be unable to cope with the fast. This is essentially a personal decision based on the criteria set by Islamic teachings.
4. Staff should be aware of Ramadan approaching and should be aware of the fact that Muslim students may be fasting and should be sensitive to their situation. If staff require support and/or advice on any aspects of Ramadan, they should contact the equality and diversity team in the first instance.
5. Many Muslims wish to pray more often during Ramadan, typically for a few minutes two or three times a day. Having a quiet and private space to pray is often very much appreciated. Consider if you have such space to offer.
6. Where it is practicable and possible, permit Muslim students to take a break at sunset to break their fast and pray.
7. Where it is practicable and possible, consider allowing Muslim students to work a shorter lunch break in return for an earlier finish.
8. If you cannot allow students to finish earlier, permit Muslim students to take a power nap during their lunch break – since they will not be eating during that time anyway.
9. If you have a canteen, try to arrange for it [or another space] to be available for Muslim students wishing to break their fast with others.
10. Do not ask Muslim students to commit to evening functions or to significant travel away from home during Ramadan unless necessary for the purposes of their placement.
11. Where it is practicable and possible avoid scheduling Muslim students for night shifts – this is because of the need to perform extra prayers.
12. Be prepared for people to request time off at the end of Ramadan and to make this time up on other days (for example on weekends or Bank Holidays).

Guidance prepared with help of Muslim Chaplains University of Manchester and 18 other University Chaplains in the UK, Hospital Chaplains in Manchester, ISOC and consultations with Muslim Students

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Further information

- 1) NHS Ramadan Health Guide, which gives info on general health issues around fasting:
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthylramadan/Pages/fastingandhealth.aspx>
- 2) The ACAS guide called 'Religion or belief and the workplace' provides useful guidance on prayer in the workplace:
<http://www.acas.org.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=107&p=0>
- 3) For a more detailed list on what medical interventions nullify the fast and which ones do not please see: http://www.nelft.nhs.uk/about_us/equality/equality_links
- 4) Other guidance to support staff during the Ramadan period can be found at http://www.nelft.nhs.uk/about_us/equality/equality_links
- 5) Working Muslim Guide
<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/about-dmu-documents/equality-and-diversity/equality-information-january-2012/theworkingmusliminramadan.pdf>
- 6) NHS Guidance On a "Healthier Ramadan"
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_078408.pdf
- 7) Equality and Diversity Calendar 2018
<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=35208>