



The Om depicted here (also spelled Aum) is a well known Hindu Sacred sound and symbol.

## HINDUISM

Hinduism, which developed in the area of modern day India, is among the oldest of the world's faiths. The faith originally derived from the *Vedic* scriptures (or *Vedas*), in existence for up to 6000 years.

Hinduism is a vast religion. Hindus worship One Supreme Reality (God) and believe that all souls ultimately become one (*self-realise*) with the Supreme Reality. Various divine qualities of the Supreme Reality are expressed through Gods and Goddesses. Spiritual well-being comes from leading a dedicated life based on non-violence, love, good conduct and selfless service, and ultimately from experiencing the existence of the Supreme Reality within. The Truth may be realised through devotion to a particular aspect of the Supreme Reality, hence the worship of Gods such as Lord Krishna and Goddesses such as Durga, and practices such as self-analysis, selfless service and meditation.

Hinduism has influenced other traditions such as Buddhism.

Fourteen per cent of the world's population are Hindus who live predominantly in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

# Summary of Essential Practice Points:

Please refer to the full text of the highlighted points related to the following summary points.

## **1 Profile of Hinduism in Ireland:**

Census 2006 indicates that the number of Hindus increased significantly between 2002 and 2006. The main community is of Indian ethnic origin from India, other parts of Asia and South Africa. There are also ethnic Irish Hindu followers.

## **2 Beliefs about the treatment of illness and Traditional Medicine:**

Some Hindus may follow the traditional Hindu system of medicine known as *Ayurveda*. Check if the person is taking herbal remedies and determine if the content conflicts with any prescribed medication.

## **3 Religious contacts:**

Presently there are no Hindu priests in Ireland who can lead religious practices. Source the name of a family or community contact who can attend to traditional rituals, particularly in relation to death. Three Hindu community representatives have agreed to be available to provide religious services if necessary, their names are provided at the end of the section.

## **4 Food and the content of medicine:**

For religious and cultural reasons food requirements need to be discussed with the person and provision made to source culturally appropriate food.

## **5 Family dynamics, decision making and community visits:**

Commonly, people of Indian ethnicity consult family members and women consult their husbands about medical decisions. Some families may expect to be automatically involved in decision making.

## **6 Death-related religious rituals:**

Hinduism subscribes to a belief in the cycle of life, death and reincarnation. Death is a significant event, potentially signalling liberation from this cycle, and hence there are particular rituals involved in preparing for death. Where family are unavailable, one of the contacts listed at the end of the section has indicated willingness to attend to the traditional death rituals and can be contacted for this purpose. They may also be contacted if the person has died without receiving traditional rituals.

## **7 Cleaning and touching the body:**

Traditionally the family prepared the body according to customary practice. Where family is available check their preference. Where the person has no immediate family in Ireland contributors have indicated that it is appropriate for healthcare staff to clean and wash the body.

## **8 Birth and initiation rituals:**

Noting the exact time of a baby's birth is important as many Hindus consult their horoscope (placing of the planets, stars, etc., at the moment of birth) at various times throughout their lives.

## Profile of Hinduism in Ireland

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### Essential Practice Point

1

There has been a Hindu community in Ireland since the 1980s. Census 2006 indicates that the number of Hindus increased by just over 96% between 2002 and 2006. Hindu contacts indicate the number of followers in Ireland is higher than the Census figure of 6,082.

The main Irish Hindu community is of Indian ethnic origin, the main grouping from the Indian sub-continent with others from Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines and from South Africa. The main communities in Ireland are in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick with some in other urban centres.

There are also ethnic Irish Hindu followers, some of whom are married to people of Indian ethnicity and who follow the faith, and others who are part of groups such as the Hare Krishna movement.

Cultural norms in India have implications for how Hindus of Indian origin behave. As this is the dominant group in the Hindu community these norms are discussed in the material below.

At present most worship is conducted in the home or at private facilities. There is a Hindu Cultural Centre Ireland organisation but there is no formal place of worship as of now, and there are plans to build a Hindu Temple in the environs of Dublin.

## Care of the ill

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### ***Beliefs about the treatment of illness and Traditional Medicine***

- Hindu scriptures discuss *karma*, the law of cause and effect, where each individual creates their destiny through their thoughts, words and actions. Hindus believe that illness and health-related issues may result from their karma in this or past lifetimes. Illness and difficult situations provide the opportunity to purify the karma and evolve spiritually.

### Essential Practice Point

2

- Some Hindus may follow the traditional Hindu system of medicine known as *ayurveda*, which treats imbalances with meditation, diet, exercise and herbal remedies. Some may prefer to continue these practices while undergoing western medical treatment.
- Check if the person is taking herbal remedies and determine if the content conflicts with any prescribed medication.

### ***Religious contacts***

### Essential Practice Point

3

- Presently there are no Hindu priests in Ireland who can lead religious practices. Hence, it is advised to seek the name of a family or community contact who can attend to traditional rituals if needed and particularly in relation to death.

- Three Hindu contacts have agreed to provide guidance and religious services related to death if requested by the person or family. Their names are provided at the end of the section.

### **Religious practices**

- Religious practices may include prayer, meditation and the reading of scripture. A small picture or statue of a Deity may be used in prayer or a *mantra* (a sound vibration representing an aspect of the Divine) may be recited on a *mala* (prayer beads strung together). Some may wish to face North or East during religious practice. These practices do not need any specific accommodation from the healthcare setting unless a specific request is made.

### **Food and the content of medicine**

#### **Essential Practice Point**

**4**

- Food requirements need to be discussed with the person and provision made to source culturally appropriate food, as necessary.
- Vegetarianism is recommended in Hindu scriptures and is widespread in India.
- Hindus are free to choose their own diet and many eat some types of meat. Beef should not be offered to a Hindu as the cow is sacred to Hindus. Some will not eat pork.
- Spices and salt are commonly used, yoghurt and sweets taken with meals and ghee (clarified butter) is used instead of oil in cooking.

- Eating with the right hand, without cutlery, is the traditional method, while in Ireland eating with cutlery is considered acceptable.
- A person should be advised if medication contains animal products so that they can make a choice about whether to use the medicine or not.

### **Ablutions and washing**

Culturally, rules observed in many parts of Asia may be followed by some Hindus. The bed-bound may request water for washing before prayer, before eating and possibly after toileting.

- Most are likely to wash before prayer and before eating.
- Traditionally people wash after toileting, although in the West people may prefer to use toilet paper.
- Those of Asian origin tend to showers for daily washing and some may prefer to use running water rather than a bath to wash if a shower facility is not available.

### **Gender issues and modesty**

- Hindus may adhere to traditional modesty observances common among people of Asian origin. Both men and women may prefer to be as covered as much as possible during a physical examination and may prefer a physical examination to be as private as possible.
- Women are increasingly being treated by male medical personnel in India and are unlikely to request a female practitioner.

## **Family dynamics, decision making and community visits**

### Essential Practice Point

5

Cultural norms in India relating to extended family bonds, community bonds, respect for elders and respect for private space have implications for how all Hindus of Indian ethnicity will behave in healthcare settings.

- The person may wish to consult family members in the making of any medical decisions, such as whether or not to operate, and some may expect to be automatically involved in decision making.
  - A woman may wish to consult her husband about medical decisions in line with traditional norms in India.
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- Family and community will visit an ill person, sometimes in large numbers and these may need to be managed.
  - When visiting an older relative the visitor may stand until invited to sit by his/her elder.
  - In India a person normally removes their shoes before entering a home, a place of worship, and certain other places. Hindu visitors may choose to remove their shoes before entering the ill person's private space (room, cubicle, etc.).
  - Most Hindus speak English but use their native language with others who speak the same language or dialect. Hindi is the major mother tongue of most Hindus.

## **Blood Transfusion and Organ Transplantation**

Selfless giving is a virtuous act in Hinduism. Hindus therefore are likely to be extremely grateful for blood transfusion or organ transplantation.

## Care of the Dying

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### **Family and community visits**

See points under the theme *Family dynamics, decision making and community visits* above.

### **Death-related religious rituals**

#### Essential Practice Point

6

Hinduism subscribes to a belief in *samsara*, the cycle of life, death and reincarnation, until liberation (*moksha*) is achieved. Death is a hugely significant life event signalling either the attainment of liberation or the continuation on the pilgrimage of life. There are particular rituals involved in preparing for death. These include reading passages from holy texts, using holy water from the source of the Ganges River in India and offering blessed food (*prashad*).

- In the event that death is imminent and family is not available, one of the contacts listed at the end of the section has indicated willingness to attend to the traditional death rituals and can be contacted for this purpose. They may also be contacted if the person has died without receiving traditional rituals and they will attend to the necessary practices.

## **Customs to be observed at death**

- Hinduism encourages family and mourners to not be excessive in their mourning so that the soul can leave and journey on. They are also encouraged to remember the deceased with happy thoughts as the soul will receive those positive thoughts.
- If the body has to be left alone, a light or a candle should be left burning (safely) near the head of the deceased as a mark of respect and to comfort their soul.
- It is practice for interment to take place within 24 hours. If there is a delay (for example if the death needs to be reported to the coroner) this needs to be explained to the family.

## **Cleaning and touching the body**

### **Essential Practice Point**

7

- Traditionally the family prepared the body according to customary practice; where family is available check their preference.
- In the event that family are conducting the customary preparation and are not immediately available, healthcare staff should only conduct essential tasks such as closing the eyes of the deceased, removing any tubes and cleaning any excretions.
- Where the person has no immediate family in Ireland, contributors have indicated that it is appropriate for healthcare staff to clean and wash the body.

## **Postmortem requirements**

- Most Hindus will not object to compulsory postmortems, providing all of the organs are returned to the body.

- A postmortem should be carried out as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made for interment to take place quickly.

## **Religious Icons and Symbols**

### **Personal and religious items**

- Many Hindu practitioners are likely to carry images of Gods or Goddesses and holy beads. These items need to be treated with reverence.
- Female Hindus of Indian ethnicity wear wedding jewellery and this should not be removed without permission from the family.
- Hindu males may wear a *sacred thread* and this should not be removed without permission.
- If for any reason the sacred threads and jewellery needs to be removed the family's permission must be sought and it should only be removed in their presence.

### **Use of religious symbols**

It is not appropriate to display icons of Christianity in the mortuary area when a Hindu family is using the facility.

### **Interment ritual**

Hindus will want to return the body of their dead relative to the earth as quickly as possible and before the next sunset if they can. The traditional method of disposal is cremation and the ashes scattered into a river. Some may return the ashes to the Ganges River.

### **Bereavement**

Traditionally a Hindu family remain in mourning for a period of thirteen days, time secluded from the rest

of their community and purifying themselves and their home. At the end of this period the community joins in a prayer service.

## Additional Note on Maternity and Paediatric Care

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### ***Birth and initiation rituals***

- Traditionally, in the East a husband did not attend a birth while in the West the Hindu husband may wish to be present.
- Hindu women breastfeed their children within their own culture.
- Community members may visit the mother and newborn child and normally they bring gifts for the baby.

### Essential Practice Point

8

- Many Hindus consult their horoscope (placing of the planets, stars, etc., at the moment of birth) at various times throughout their lives. Noting the exact time of a baby's birth is important to precisely determine the child's horoscope.
- On the 10th day after birth the child is named, blessed and given a Hindu name. This ritual is called *Namkaran Sanskar*.

### ***Foetal, infant and child death***

- Miscarriage and stillbirth may be sensitive issues for a Hindu woman and her family. There may be beliefs that the events were influenced by karmic processes. The woman and her family may prefer to deal with the

matters privately and quietly.

- Traditional death rituals, including the preparation of the body, are carried out on foetuses that die from the third month onward, infants and children. Follow the guidelines above.

## Developing a Hindu Contact

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The name of a religious contact should be sought directly from the person. In an emergency one of the following may be contacted if the religious representative is not available and religious services or guidance are required:

Mr Sudhansh Verma @ 085 7218803

Mr Deepak Inamdar @ 087 4179502

Dr Hemant Kumar @ 087 9185153

***For general information contact the Hindu Cultural Centre of Ireland:***

*Website:* [www.hindu.ie](http://www.hindu.ie)

*Email:* [info@hindu.ie](mailto:info@hindu.ie)

## Contributors

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Mr Vivekanand Sakaram, Irish Vinayaka Temple, provided information for the section. Mr Sudhansh Verma, Mr Deepak Inamdar and Dr Hemant Kumar (General Practitioner) from the Hindu Cultural Centre of Ireland made a joint contribution to this section and approved the finalised section.