

Caring for the Catholic Patient

Meeting the Pastoral Needs of Catholic Patients

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales
Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship
Healthcare Reference Group



CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

Contents

Introduction	3
What to do if a Catholic patient requests a Catholic chaplain.	6
What to do if a Catholic patient dies	12
Days of importance for Catholics	13

Introduction

Caring in healthcare has been defined as a moral imperative or ideal¹ and involves ministrations that are person-centred, protective, anticipatory, physically comforting and go beyond routine care of the patient². As healthcare practitioners there is, therefore, a moral obligation to ensure that the physiological, psychological and spiritual needs of the patient are met. Catholic patients will want their spiritual needs met through the assistance of a priest. This booklet has been designed to assist the healthcare practitioner in deciding what to do when a Catholic patient requests a Catholic chaplain.

The Catholic Church has its origin in the life and mission of Jesus Christ and is present throughout the world. Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God as well as being fully human, who died and then rose from the dead to save humankind. During his life he preached the coming of the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of

¹ Watson, J. (1995) *Nursing: Human Science and Human Care*. Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century Crofts, p58.

² Swanson, K. (1991) *Empirical development of middle range theory of caring*. *Nursing Research*, 40: 161-166, p161.

eternal life for those who follow him. After he returned to his Father, he sent the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen the Church in its mission to preach his message of salvation.

Jesus Christ entrusted the on-going work of salvation to the Church through his apostles. This responsibility and authority has been passed down in an unbroken tradition to the bishops, who are the visible source and foundation of unity for Catholics. The Christian life and worship of Catholics generally takes place within the local community of the parish, which is a portion of the diocese entrusted by the bishop to the pastoral care of the parish priest. Continuing contact with their parish is an important aspect of the spiritual care of a Catholic patient.

Catholics believe that Jesus instituted the seven sacraments, in which the dynamic presence of Jesus is experienced through word and action.

The sacraments are divided into: the Sacraments of Christian Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist); then the Sacraments of Healing (Penance and the Anointing of the Sick); the Sacraments at the Service of Communion and Mission (Holy Orders and Matrimony). The sacraments touch all the important moments of a Catholic's life.³

³ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, N. 250, The Catholic Truth Society, 2006, p89

Central to Catholic life is prayer and worship at Sunday Mass where Catholics give thanks to God and offer their lives to Him. They receive the Body and Blood of Christ at Holy Communion in the form of bread and wine that builds them up as the people of God.

What to do if a Catholic patient requests a Catholic chaplain

There are various reasons why a Catholic patient may request to see a Catholic chaplain. Catholics have a great respect for the sanctity of life from conception to death. Patients and staff may wish to have the support of a chaplain.

Baptism

- If a baby is in danger of death a mother may request that a member of staff contact the chaplain to baptise their child. Baptism is a sacrament which involves the pouring of water over the child, while invoking the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Catholics believe that this sacrament enables them to share in the life of Jesus Christ and to be members of his Church.
- The chaplain may request sterilised water in a small container.
- The chaplain will need to spend time with the baby's parents and may request that the baptism is private with screens drawn around the family.

- In an emergency where a chaplain is not available, any baptised adult may carry out the ceremony. When an emergency baptism is performed, the chaplain must be notified.
- Sometimes, in danger of death, an adult may request to be baptised. The same procedure needs to be followed as above.

Holy Communion

- For Catholics, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is truly present when they receive Holy Communion, usually under the form of a small wafer of bread. A priest, a deacon, or a person known as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, may administer this.
- The chaplain or priest may consult with staff in deciding whether Holy Communion can be given to a patient (who may be feeling sick or fasting before a medical procedure).
- The chaplain and patient may wish for screens to be drawn around the bed for privacy.
- If the patient is very poorly, a small particle of Holy Communion may be administered under the tongue which will not interfere with medical procedures. When Holy Communion is administered to a dying patient, it is called “Viaticum” meaning “food for the journey.”

Confession

A Catholic patient may request to see a priest to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance. In this sacrament, Catholics experience the forgiveness of God by confessing their faults and receiving absolution which leads them to peace and a change of life. This sacrament is also known as Confession or Reconciliation.

- Only a Catholic priest can hear a Catholic's confession.
- Privacy is essential. The priest or patient may request screens to be drawn to ensure privacy.
- What is said is absolutely confidential.

Anointing of the Sick

- This is a sacrament that Catholics receive when they are seriously ill. They will especially want it before undergoing theatre procedures. This sacrament can only be administered by a Catholic priest. It is also known as the Sacrament of the Sick.
- The priest brings specially blessed oil and anoints the patient on their head and hands while saying some special prayers. In this celebration the patient is reminded of the compassion of Jesus for people who are sick. Oil is traditionally associated with strength and healing and is a sign

that the patient is being given strength for the journey towards healing and recovery or death.

- The Anointing of the Sick is often associated with the Sacrament of Penance (Confession) and the receiving of Holy Communion, especially near to death.
- Please note that sometimes requests may be made for the “Last Rites” (also known as Extreme Unction). In the past it was offered as close to the moment of death as possible. This is the reason why so many people do not think of calling a priest sooner, and why the approach of a priest can be unsettling for the sick person. Priests nowadays prefer to see the patient well before this stage. Practice has shifted for many reasons, but it is important to assure the seriously ill person of God’s healing presence, and to try to diminish the fear of death.
- Catholics have an expectation that a Catholic priest will be called in the case of an emergency, or if they lapse into unconsciousness.
- This sacrament is not given to a patient who has died. It is important to call a Catholic priest before death occurs.
- The priest may wish for screens to be drawn to provide privacy for the patient and the family.

Prayer

- Prayer is essential to Catholics and is about communicating with God. For Catholics, prayer is about being able to share one's worries and joys, as well as listening for God's guidance.
- Catholic patients may wish to talk to a chaplain about how they pray. Chaplains are trained in discerning how to direct someone in their prayer life.
- If a Catholic patient wishes to pray, they may need privacy and wish to pull screens around their bed. If they are mobile, they may wish to visit the hospital chapel.
- Catholics enjoy a diversity of devotions within prayer. Some may wish to pray the *Rosary*. The Rosary is a string of beads, that guides people through the life of Jesus while repeating specific prayers. Rosary beads have religious significance for Catholics both for prayer and because they are often blessed. Rosary beads are often twined round the hands of a dead Catholic to symbolise their prayer and journey through life and into eternity. In Critical Care Units when patients are seriously ill and unable to hold the Rosary, it may be placed at the head of the bed or under the patient's pillow.

- *Medals* which are worn by Catholics on a chain around their neck, are another symbol of prayer. Medals may bear an image of Jesus, or of Mary the Mother of God (a very common medal of this kind is called “*The Miraculous Medal*”) or of a particular Saint. Like a Rosary, medals will often be placed in the hands or around the neck of a dead Catholic as a sign of their faith and devotion. In Critical Care Units when patients are seriously ill, the medal may be placed at the head of the bed or pinned to the patient’s gown or pillow.
- *Scapulars* are similar to medals, but are made of cloth. In Critical Care Units when patients are seriously ill, the scapular may be placed at the head of the bed or pinned to the patient’s gown or pillow.
- Before preparing a Catholic patient for an operation or procedure, staff may need to ask the patient to remove their medals or scapulars. Staff should reassure the patient that these will be stored in a safe place.

What to do if a Catholic patient dies

If the Catholic patient has received the Anointing of Sick before dying, it may still be necessary to call the Catholic chaplain when the patient has died. It is always important to ask the family or the next of kin of the deceased patient before doing this. Sometimes, if the death has occurred in the night, the family will be prepared to wait until the morning before the Catholic chaplain is called.

Catholic families may wish the chaplain to lead prayers for the recently deceased person. They may also wish to talk about funeral arrangements.

Before moving the dead Catholic patient to the mortuary, staff should ask the family or the next of kin if they would like Rosary beads, medals or scapulars to be removed or placed with their loved one.

They may wish to talk to the Catholic chaplain.

Before death Catholic patients may wish to talk to a Catholic chaplain about a dilemma in their lives, or worries about their families. It is important that they have access to a member of the Catholic chaplaincy who can understand their needs and concerns. Please ensure that privacy is maintained whenever a patient is speaking with a priest.

Days of importance for Catholics

Catholic patients may wish to see a Catholic chaplain, or visit the hospital chapel on certain dates:

On a Sunday

Sunday is the day when Catholics, like all Christians, keep the Lord's Day holy by celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They do this by gathering to celebrate Mass, in which they give praise to God for his actions by listening to the Scriptures, professing their faith, and praying for the Church and the world. They then share in the bread and wine of the Eucharist in which they partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion.

All Saints Day (1st November)

The day on which Catholics remember all the Saints of the Church.

During Advent

Advent is the season of the Church's year leading up to Christmas. It includes the four Sundays before Christmas and is a time of preparation for the return (second coming) of Jesus Christ as ruler of the universe, and for his incarnation and birth.

Christmas Day (25th December)

This is the feast which celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Feast of the Epiphany (January 6th)

The feast which celebrates the showing, or revealing (epiphany) of Jesus to the world traditionally through the visit of the wise men to the stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

Ash Wednesday

The first day of Lent. On this day as a mark of repentance, Catholics traditionally have ashes, sprinkled with Holy Water, placed on their foreheads in the sign of the cross. They also fast, and abstain from eating meat. Those who are seriously ill are not expected to fast.

During Lent

A season of six weeks leading up to Holy Week and Easter. It begins on Ash Wednesday and is a time of penance and self denial in preparation for Easter.

Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday)

On this day, Catholics commemorate the last supper Jesus ate with his disciples on the night before he died. They also recall that this was when Jesus instituted the Eucharist.

Good Friday

The day on which the death of Jesus is commemorated. It is a day of special solemnity for Catholics. They fast and abstain from meat on this day.

Easter Day

The day on which Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. For Catholics, this is the day on which they renew the promises made at their baptism.

Ascension Day

This is the celebration of the return of Jesus to his Father and reflects on the promises fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Pentecost

This is the last Sunday of Easter and celebrates the birthday of the Church when the Holy Spirit came down on the apostles and sent them out to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world.

Corpus Christi: the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

A traditional Latin phrase meaning “the Body of Christ”. For Catholics, this feast celebrates the gift of the Body and Blood of Christ as Holy Communion at Mass (the Eucharist) and is celebrated on a Sunday.

The Feast Day of Saints Peter and Paul

This feast celebrates two of the early followers of Jesus. St Peter was chosen by Jesus to be head of the Apostles, and Catholics believe the bishop of Rome (or Pope) is his successor. St Paul was foremost among the first preachers of the Gospel. Both of their writings can be found in the New Testament of the Bible.

The Feast of the Assumption (August 15th)

This is an ancient memorial of the Mother of God, which signifies and synthesises many of the beliefs of Catholicism. In many places the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven is deeply imbedded in popular piety and is synonymous with the person of Our Lady, and is simply referred to as “Our Lady’s Day” or as the “Immacolada” in Spain and Latin America.