

Caring for Muslim Patients

*Edited by Aziz Sheikh and Abdul Rashid Gatrad
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Modern medicine has made miraculous advances. The results of early diagnosis, treatment, cure, and prevention of diseases have been spectacular. However, during the past three decades the realization has deepened that the Cartesian dualism, so religiously followed in western medicine, was illusory. This gradually led to a more holistic approach in the art of healing. Now both soma and psyche are considered crucial. Also, recent research in the Mind/Body area revealed that emotional, religious and cultural factors are essential in the assessment and treatment of diseases.

The book, "Caring for Muslim Patients" by Aziz Sheikh and Abdul Rashid Gatrad, is, therefore, a timely reminder to health professionals. It draws attention of the medical professionals to the religious and cultural needs of the Muslim community in Great Britain. The materials used in this book primarily relate to the Muslim communities in England, Wales and Scotland.

The book contains basic information about Islam. The five pillars of Islam are discussed briefly, and the significance of fasting and Hajj is clarified. A wide range of Muslim customs and rituals concerning birth, marriage, sex, contraception, death, and bereavement are explained for health professionals. In this respect, this book is a landmark.

It is worth noting that the contributors maintain a scientific approach in discussing all issues. Facts are stated as they are, and it is left for the readers to draw their own conclusions. The writers deserve credit for maintaining a strict impartial approach.

However, in certain areas the writers are sketchy. They fall short of doing justice to the subject. One area that can be singled out is a brief discussion of "Female genital tract mutilation." It is a highly sensitive and emotionally laden issue. After discussing three types of procedures that are performed in certain countries, the authors go on to mention that one of the least invasive of these three procedures - "is also sometimes referred to as the "Sunnah" procedure indicating that the Prophet sanctioned this from." [Page 52] One would expect due caution before the name of the Prophet (saw) is associated with this practice, even if it is one of the least invasive procedures. To support this statement, authentic sources that are unanimously accepted by Muslim scholars must be documented. The 'information gap' in this area may be extremely unsettling for the readers. Perhaps, however, this is a question for other books to pursue in depth, for the present volume represents an important preliminary step.

The editors have clearly worked hard to make this volume a unified whole, and their effort has been amply rewarded. Health professionals searching for a concise summary of information about the religious and cultural factors which have clinical implications for the Muslim community should find this book very useful. It is well written, clear and concise, and at the same time sensitively nuanced. Highly recommended.

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