



Religious Diversity and Accommodations

Office of the Medical Inspector

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VHA Diversity and Inclusion

Definitions

- Religion and spirituality are distinctively different
- Religion is based on cohesion with a group
 - Follows doctrines, rules, tenets
 - Ascribes to disciplines of a faith group (prayer, scripture)
- Spirituality is individual
 - Focused on sacredness
 - Meaning and purpose (Existential)
 - May not conform to religious tenets



American Religions

Christian	70.6%
Jewish	1.9%
Muslim	.9%
Buddhist	.7%
Hindu	.7%
Other World Religions	.3%
Unaffiliated / No Religion	22.8%
Don't Know	.6%

Do You Know?

- Holiest Jewish holiday
- Vernacular for “Anointing of the Sick”
- Sacred Undergarments
- Origins of “Holy Roller”



Protections

- First Amendment
- Equal Opportunity Law
- VA / VHA Directives
- Codes of Ethics

The First Amendment

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Definition + Protection

- Religion is protected
- Spirituality is a goal by Joint Commission
 - Associated with cultural competencies
 - Culture: a set of beliefs, values and traditions that are *socially* transmitted. It defines a group's norms or identity.
 - Sometimes does not match religious tenets
 - Spiritual Assessments include culture, religion, belief system, spiritual or religious practices, support system, barriers, strengths, coping skills, values attributed to each area, meaning and purpose (esp. w/ suffering)

VA Sensitivities

- Concerns about fellow employees are addressed via EEO.
- Concerns about patients are addressed via Chaplain Service.
- Nationally, the religious experts are National Chaplain Center.

Multicultural Definitions

- Microaggressions
 - Microinvalidation
 - Microinsult
 - Microassault
- Most are unintentional, but some are intended.



Microaggression

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons *based solely upon their marginalized group membership*.

Microinvalidation

Communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person belonging to a particular group.

EX: When speaking of Veterans, exclusively using male gender.

EX: Saying “Merry Christmas” to non-Christians or “Happy Holidays” to Jehovah Witnesses

Microinsult

Communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's ethnicity or identity (religion); subtle snubs *unknown to the perpetrator*; hidden insulting message to the recipient.

EX: When speaking of bargaining with a vendor, state that you are “jewing someone down”

EX: Greeting a priest with “I used to be Catholic”

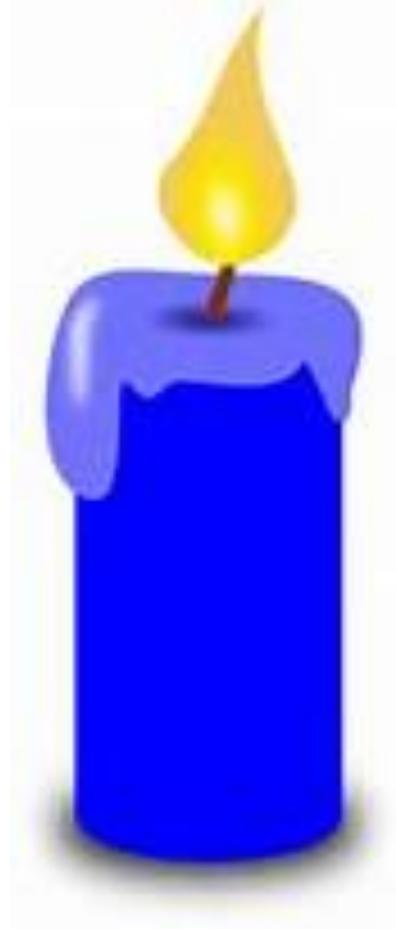
Microassault

An explicit derogation; verbal/nonverbal.

e.g.: name-calling, avoidant behavior,
purposeful discriminatory actions.

EX: Referring to a Pentecostal as a “Holy
Roller”

What is this?



Versatility in Religion

- “Light of the World”: Christian
- Festival of Lights: Jewish and Hindu
 - Hannukah
 - Diwali
- Pagans and Satanists also use candles in worship

Easily Misunderstood



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"Doctor, I don't think it's appropriate that you wrote in the patient's EMR that he's a big clown."

Diversity



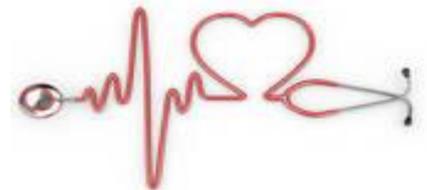
- Diversity is a strength
- Differences are valued
- Celebration of differences
- Differences also present challenges

Inclusion

- Diversity brings people to the workforce
 - Invited to the party but not engaged in activities
 - Similar to playing a game by oneself.
- Inclusion gets people involved
 - Includes divergent viewpoints
 - How does this affect another person?
 - More than simply “coexist”

Patient Care

- Based on the religious, spiritual and cultural belief system *of the patient*.
- Scope of practice: Chaplains
- Other disciplines trained to identify and *refer* to the religious and spiritual experts.
- Some religious practices are known
- Some religious practices are surprising to providers.



Patient Care: Impact

- Compliance issues may be based in religious belief systems. “I’ve never met a non-compliant patient.”
 - Ex: Decline interventions because God will heal
- Cultural impact may be rooted in religion.
 - Ex: Speaking to the head of the family or exclusively males.
 - Ex: Only same gender touches body; all others must wear gloves
- Sacred objects: Prayer cloths, clothing, etc.

Patient Care:

Religious Practices (I)

- Worship requirements suspended
- Food restrictions: SDA, Jewish, Muslim
- Jehovah Witness: Blood products, holidays, military service
- Jewish: Day of Atonement
- Native American: Drumming, chanting and dancing are forms of prayer

Patient Care:

Religious Practices (2)

- Confessions, confidentiality, privileged communication
- “Last Rites” versus “Anointing of the Sick”
- Deathbed confessions
- Period of mourning
- No girls allowed
- Baptism
- Prayer



When Beliefs Collide

- Employee – employee
- Provider – patient
 - Provider has the right to recuse self.
 - Patient has right to decline
 - Patient's beliefs guide procedures
- Guiding principle: Codes of Ethics state that no one will attempt to change the belief system of the other; proselytization prohibited.
- Awareness of your own belief systems will allow you to honor others.



Practical Suggestions

- Site visits should not take place on religious holidays.
- Both employees and patients have religious rights
- Misunderstandings will happen; learn from others
- Consult religious experts: Chaplains

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“I need one Pepsi, one Coke, one 7-Up, one large coffee, one small coffee, one mint tea, one green tea, one iced tea, one orange juice, one bottled water, and one nonalcoholic Fuzzy Navel. They’re for our Diversity Committee.”



Questions and Discussion