

This bimonthly newsletter, produced by Pastoral Care Services/Office of Diversity and Inclusion, will highlight some of the spiritual and religious beliefs held by patients and their families, providers and others in the MUSC community. It will offer strategies for staff self-care as well as information to better address the spiritual needs of the diverse patients and families that we serve.

#### Interfaith Calendar Highlights

- Dec. 1 **Mawlid al-Nabi** (Islam). Celebration of the birthday of the prophet Muhammad.
- Dec. 3-24 **Advent** (Christian). The four Sundays leading up to Christmas are a time for Christians to prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth, using the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.
- Dec. 8 **Bodhi Day** (Buddhism). Celebration of when Prince Gautama sat under the Bodhi tree and vowed to stay until he attained ultimate enlightenment..
- Dec. 13-20 **Hanukkah** (Jewish). Festival of Lights commemorating the Maccabean rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 165 BCE.
- Dec. 16-25 **Posadas Navideñas** (Christian/Mexican) Feast of the Lodgings, a remembrance of the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in preparation for the birth of Jesus.
- Dec. 21 **Solstice/Yule** (Wiccan/Christian). The beginning of winter and rebirth of the sun for Wiccans. Some Christians also celebrate it as the light of Christ coming into the world.
- Dec. 25 **Christmas Day** (Christian). Beginning of the 12-day celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

Source: <http://www.interfaith-calendar.org>

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## Remedies for the Holiday Blues

by Chaplain Frank Harris

For many people, the holiday season represents a time of festivity. But it can also be a time when feelings of grief and stress create anxiety that makes it difficult to enjoy celebration and connection with family, friends, or colleagues.

The following are a few suggestions that may aid in navigating the stressors that can occur at this particular time of year.



Image source: [Acacia Wellness Center](http://AcaciaWellnessCenter.com).

#### Reflect

Spend some time acknowledging your feelings. Emotions often become more manageable once we can simply put a name to them. Once you identify these emotions, take a non-judgmental view of them. Don't beat yourself up for being human – simply accept that our emotions are part of what makes up our humanity.

#### Reach Out

Find a supportive community to connect with. This may come in the form of enjoying recreational activities with friends or being part of special faith group gatherings. There are also many resources available which offer professional support if needed and some can be found on the MUSC Pastoral Care website: <http://www.muschealth.org/pastoral-care/index.html>

#### Be Realistic

No one is allotted more than 24 hours in a day. We all have our physical, mental, and

emotional limitations. Know where your limits are and give yourself permission to say “no” when requests go beyond your ability and responsibility to meet them. Remember, saying “no” at times makes your “yes” all the more special when you're able to offer it.

#### Rest

Many sports teams have won a game because they used a time out when they needed it. Make sure you take time out for yourself (even a few seconds to pause and breathe during a busy shift) and take care of yourself.

#### Renew

Holidays can bring about feelings of grief if we have experienced significant losses. Spend time considering why these losses are so meaningful and also what yet remains from these important experiences, including fond memories and essential legacies. Those are the things that stay with us and are worth celebrating regardless of the time of year.

*This publication provides information about the diverse patients served by MUSC Health. It introduces different cultures and communication strategies in order to foster greater respect and understanding in the delivery of culturally competent care. No generalizations about individuals should be made since all individuals differ. This special edition briefly highlights some cultural aspects of death and grief.*

## CULTURAL ASPECTS OF GRIEF

Death occurs in every culture though it is experienced or recognized differently. Despite these differences, customs surrounding death are usually undertaken with a desire to show respect, dignity and love of the deceased.

Health care providers cannot be expected to have complete knowledge of the mourning rituals, customs and traditions of every culture however in line with MUSC's commitment to delivering patient-centered care, providers should seek to understand the range of expectations from families including:

- Cultural rituals for coping with death (i.e. crying, chanting, screaming, praying, etc.)
- Practices following death including final burial arrangements

The complexity and variety of religious beliefs and cultural practices is immense. While some cultures seem to require stoicism in the face of death, other cultures feel that love for the deceased is best shown by *intense* crying and grief.

Balinese Funeral Procession



Image source: [www.frazierconsultants.com](http://www.frazierconsultants.com)

Cultures that share the same religious affiliation may grieve differently. For example, although Egypt and Bali both practice the Islam faith, their customs related to death are different. Balinese women may be strongly urged to hold in their tears while Egyptian women are encouraged to cry intensely. Modern Balinese tend to

follow an elaborate cleansing ceremony prior to cremation. The Islamic custom of cleansing the body and burying it within three days following death is typical in Egypt.

In Japan, death is viewed as a time of freedom that should be endured with acceptance and strength by family and friends and is not openly discussed. In China, on the other hand, many may hire professional mourners to be involved in the funeral procession. Many believe in the afterlife.

Chinese Funeral Ceremony



Image source: [www.gentlemansgazette.com](http://www.gentlemansgazette.com)

In Latino cultures, women may be very demonstrative in showing signs of grief. In some rural areas of Ecuador, families may also hire "Las Lloronas", or professional mourners. Most men in Latino cultures are encouraged to hold back outward signs of grief.

A number of customs in African culture are associated with the belief that the dead do not cease to exist but continue to have a role in protecting the family. Family members want to ensure that the deceased is able to join fellow ancestors otherwise, they may continue to roam around and possibly harm the living.

Ongoing education about cultural practices surrounding death and grief can help providers to support families during this challenging time .

Sources: [www.dimensionsofculture.com/2010/11/cultural-aspects-of-death-dying/](http://www.dimensionsofculture.com/2010/11/cultural-aspects-of-death-dying/) and [www.dying.lovetoknow.com](http://www.dying.lovetoknow.com)