

Slide 10 – Dietary Requirements

Dietary Requirements

Religiously motivated food restrictions that impact meals and/or medication.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- A Jewish family may be concerned as to whether the infant formula they are using is certified kosher.
- A Muslim patient may request halal meals during his/her stay at the hospital.
- The son of an elderly Hindu patient suffering from dementia is distraught when he discovers that his mother has been served (and eaten) a non-vegetarian meal.

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- 1) **Dietary Requirements:** Religiously motivated food restrictions that impact meals and/or medication.
- 2) **For Example:**
 - a. A Jewish family may be concerned as to whether the infant formula they are using is certified kosher.

NOTE: Kosher foods are those that are permissible according to Jewish law. Judaism teaches that following a law given by God helps one to concentrate the mind on God's will and one's duty to God. It is a demonstration of one's commitment to the faith and helps provide a sense of connection to others who follow the same commandments.

RECOMMENDATION: Familiarize yourself with the infant formula brands that are certified kosher and be mindful that there are a variety of kosher certifying agencies, some more strict and others more lenient. Work with parents to find products with kosher certifications that they will accept.

MORE INFORMATION: pg. 53-54 of *The Medical Manual for Religio-Cultural Competence*



- b. A Muslim patient may request halal meals during his/her stay at the hospital.

NOTE: Islam teaches that certain foods have been declared by Allah to be either halal (permissible) or haram (forbidden). Eating halal foods is an important religious practice through which Muslims demonstrate discipline that shows their submission to Allah.

RECOMMENDATION: Establish early on what food accommodations your hospital has available. The Department of Pastoral Care or chaplaincy services should be able to provide this information to you.

MORE INFORMATION: pg. 89-90 of *The Medical Manual for Religio-Cultural Competence*

- c. The son of an elderly Hindu patient suffering from dementia is distraught when he discovers that his mother has been served (and eaten) a non-vegetarian meal.

NOTE: Many Hindus believe that it is a religious requirement to avoid doing harm to any living creature; thus, many Hindus are sensitive to their food sources and are vegetarians.

RECOMMENDATION: As a doctor, if you learn that one of your patients has a dietary restriction, convey this information to the appropriate hospital personnel who can make sure that this request is accommodated and be sure to document the information.

MORE INFORMATION: pg. 117-118 of *The Medical Manual for Religio-Cultural Competence*

EXPANDED CASE STUDY: See next page



Supplementary Case Study

The Case: An 85-year-old Hindu woman with dementia is admitted to the hospital after injuring herself in a fall. Her son is with her when she is admitted and requests vegetarian meals for her. The next day the patient's son comes into his mother's room after her meal had been served and finds her in the process of finishing a meatball. Due to her dementia, she isn't aware of what she just ate. The patient's son is extremely upset. The nutritionist responds by saying "mistakes happen" and says she cannot guarantee that the mistake won't happen again. The patient's son becomes even more upset after hearing this response.¹

Discussion Question: As a doctor, how would you respond to the son's concerns?

Recommendations:

- As a doctor, if you learn that one of your patients has a dietary restriction, convey this information to the appropriate hospital personnel who can make sure that this request is accommodated.
- If a mistake occurs, apologize and reassure the patient/family member that steps are being taken to make sure the mistake does not recur.
- Communicate with the patient to fully understand his or her concerns and acknowledge those concerns as valid.
- It is important to understand, and communicate that you understand, the situation from the family's perspective. The nutritionist was viewing the situation from her own cultural and professional lens and clearly communicated in her statement, "Mistakes happen," that she had not grasped the significance of the situation for the family.

The Outcome: The doctor had a conversation with the patient's son and learned that his mother was a devout Hindu who had never eaten meat in her life. The son explained that his mother would be devastated if she realized what she had done and that this incident was a very painful reminder of how far his mother's health had deteriorated. The doctor apologized to the patient's son for the mistake that had been made. She acknowledged how difficult this must be for him and assured him that she would do everything in her power to ensure that this would not happen again. The son thanked the doctor and left the room still shaken but confident that his concerns had been understood and would be addressed.

¹ Case drawn from Tanenbaum interview