**Ramadan Tip Sheet**

*For Hospice Employees and Volunteers*

Islam is the most diverse faith group in America and the Muslim community in Middle Tennessee, which is over 45,000 strong, is no different. Nashville is home to the largest Kurdish population in America at around 20 thousand and a significant Somali population of around 5 thousand. Over 40 ethnic groups are represented here, including African Americans, Arabs, South Asians, Afghans, Persians, and more. Moreover, Muslims come from  diverse professional, economic, social, and educational backgrounds.

For Muslims around the world, the holy month of Ramadan is a time to reconnect with God. Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Since the lunar calendar is shorter than the commonly used solar calendar, Ramadan starts 10-11 days earlier every year.  In 2023, Ramadan will start on the evening of March 22nd  and will end at sunset on April 20th. Ramadan is a month long spiritual retreat, where Muslims fast from dawn to sunset, refraining from eating, drinking and intimate sexual relations. This is a time for Muslims to increase their taqwa or God-consciousness. They deepen their relationship with God through fasting each day, increasing recitation of the Holy Qur’an, performing extra prayers, increasing charitable giving and performing other good deeds. Here are several tips to help hospice employees and volunteers better serve families during Ramadan.

**Hospice Patients and Fasting**

Islam is a religion of ease. Those who are unable to fast because of a chronic illness, a terminal condition, or overall poor health, are exempt from fasting. Instead, they are required to feed a fasting person for each fast they miss. Although hospice patients would normally fall under this exemption, patients feel left out and want to celebrate the month with their family. So they may ‘fast’ as much as possible: skipping daytime meals or sharing in the pre-dawn and iftar meals with their families. They may also refuse medications during fasting hours. Typically,  IV treatments and injections will not break a fast unless it is used to replace or supplement food or drinks. Be respectful of the patient’s wishes and consult with their  family to work through a plan that is safe for the patient during Ramadan. The need for a Muslim patient to connect with God during this time is powerful and can improve their emotional and spiritual well-being and give them peace.

**Eating and Sleeping Schedules**

* *Try not to schedule early morning visits.*

A Muslim’s’ daily routine changes during Ramadan. In addition to not eating or drinking all day, Muslims spend more time in prayer. Besides the five daily prayers performed year round, Muslims perform extra prayers late at night or before dawn in Ramadan.  Families will also wake up 1.5 to 2 hours before sunrise to share a meal called suhoor in preparation for the fast and to perform their early morning prayers.  Many Muslims will go back to sleep afterwards and if possible, wake up later than usual. The last 10 days of Ramadan are spiritually significant and Muslims may stay up all or most of the night reciting prayers.  Ask families if they would like to reschedule early morning visits to later in the day.

* *Try not to schedule visits within an hour of sunset*

Muslims break the fast at sunset with a special meal called iftar. This is a busy time for families as they prepare the special iftar meal and make special supplications right before iftar.

**Recitation of the Qur’an**

Muslims spend more time reciting the Holy Qur’an in Ramadan. It is common for families to have the recitation of the Qur’an playing near a patient since it is considered to be therapeutic.  Some families will turn off the Quran when speaking or may simply turn down the volume. Patients feel a sense of peace as they spend more time reciting the Qur’an if they have the energy or at least listening to the recitation.

**Eid al Fitr: Celebrating the End of Ramadan**

Muslims celebrate the end of Ramadan with Eid al Fitr or the festival of breaking the fast which is a three day celebration. It begins the first day of the month following Ramadan and starts with an early morning prayer at a community gathering. Muslims greet each other by saying ‘Eid Mubarak’ or ‘Eid Blessings.’ Muslims will usually take off from work or school to spend the rest of the day visiting with family and friends, sharing special meals and sweets, and exchanging gifts.  In 2023, Eid al Fitr will begin on the evening of April 20.  Muslim patients will most likely receive more visitors during the eid celebrations. Both Ramadan and Eid al Fitr is a time when Muslims love to share special dishes and desserts, so do not be surprised if you are offered some treats!