

**College of Medical and Dental Sciences
University of Birmingham**

**College Guidelines for Religious Observation
Amongst Muslim Students**

Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Issues Affecting Students on Campus	3
2.1 Multi-faith Prayer Room Usage.....	3
2.2 Announcements in Lecture Theatres	3
2.3 Performance of Prayers during Teaching Hours.....	3
2.4 Physical Examinations of fellow students	4
2.5 The Friday Prayer (Juma')	4
2.5.1 Performance of the Friday Prayer during Teaching Hours.....	5
2.6 Materials Permitted for Written Examinations	5
3. Issues Affecting students on campus and on clinical placements	5
3.1 Face Veil (Niqab)	5
3.2 Eid	6
3.3 Ramadan	6
3.3.1 Breaking the Fast	6
3.3.2 Travel to Clinical Placements during Ramadan.....	7
4. Issues Affecting Students during clinical placements	7
4.1. Performance of Prayers during clinical placement	7
4.2 Performance of the Friday Prayer (Juma')	7
4.3 Shaking Hands	8
4.4 Examination of patients	8
4.5 'Out of hours' work.....	8
4.6 Procedure for Operating Theatres	9
4.7 'Bare Below the Elbows' Dress Code	9
5. Course specific information	11
5.1 MBChB.....	11
5.1.1 Tutor Group Meetings.....	11
5.1.2 Tutor Group Meetings in Ramadan	11
6. Major festivals of the Islamic calendar.....	12
7. Contact Information	14

1. Introduction

This document has been produced in response to issues raised by various groups at Birmingham Medical School on matters of Muslim religious observance within the MBChB course. This document was originally compiled by a group of Muslim medical students (representing the five years) studying at the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. Great effort was made to make sure that as large a number of Muslim students as possible were involved in its composition. Since the University restructuring, dental, nursing, physiotherapy and physician assistant courses have come under the remit of the College. It was therefore deemed timely to have guidance that would help all students on clinically orientated courses to fulfil their religious observances appropriately.

The document has three main purposes:

- To raise awareness about some of the day to day situations Muslim students experience whilst studying clinically based courses, amongst the student body, staff, and the various Mental Health, Primary Care and Hospital Trusts affiliated with the College of Medical and Dental Sciences,.
- To provide students with experiential advice on how to deal with areas of potential difficulty.
- To provide additional guidance for students undertaking clinically orientated courses to that already covered in the University policy on *Accommodating Student's Religious Observances 2008/09*

Regarding the latter, any relevant College policy has been highlighted and its implications to the matter explained. Additionally, links to further reading that is thought to be useful have been provided in the footnotes.

In an attempt to ensure that this guidance complies with all existing University and College of Medical and Dental Sciences guidelines, extensive consultation with senior College staff, along with the Birmingham University Chaplaincy (in particular Dr. Aqil Chaudry), has occurred.

These guidelines have been approved by the following groups:

- College Learning and Teaching Committee
- MBChB Student Welfare and Disciplinary Advisory Group (SWADAG)
- The Curriculum Development and Implementation Groups of the respective College clinically orientated courses (MBChB, BDS, BNurs, BSc Physiotherapy , Postgraduate Diploma Physician Assistant Studies)
- Taught Postgraduate Programme Committee and Graduate Studies Committee.

A review of this document will occur annually in July by Dr. June Jones, College Lead on Religious and Cultural Diversity, in collaboration with student representatives.

2. Issues Affecting Students on Campus

2.1 Multi-faith Prayer Room Usage

The College of Medical and Dental Sciences has provided students of all faiths with a multi-faith prayer room, situated adjacent to the Medical School building, in which religious duties may be observed. In practice, due to the frequency with which Islamic prayers must be performed, the majority of usage of the rooms is by Muslim students. Thus, Muslim students should be aware that the College has requested that no literature or posters are placed in the prayer rooms without prior consultation with the Birmingham University Islamic Society Medical Representatives, who will in turn liaise with the College Estates Office (*see section 5.1 for contact information*). Additionally, in keeping with the multi-faith nature of the room, prayer mats must be stowed away after use every day.

For Muslims to perform the prayer they must be in a state of ablution (*wudu*). Although there are no dedicated washing facilities available in the Medical School building, the School has permitted students to perform ablution in any of the washing room sinks, provided that students do not use the sinks to wash their feet; for which the College of Medical and Dental Sciences Estates Office has installed low level showers in the lower ground floor toilets.

2.2 Announcements in Lecture Theatres

The College does not permit unauthorised announcements to be made before or after a lecture. Should students wish to make an announcement, they must obtain permission firstly from the academic giving the lecture, and secondly from the appropriate Islamic society student representative (*see section 5.1 for contact information*). Permission from the Islamic society student rep is to ensure that there is oversight of lecture announcements from a potentially large group of students.

2.3 Performance of Prayers during Teaching Hours

Due to the possibility of being able to offer the five daily prayers within a specific time range, there are usually suitable gaps in a student's timetable where prayer can be performed. However, during the winter months when the time range for prayers shortens, students may find that lectures, small group teachings sessions, etc. are timetabled in such a manner that there is no free time in which to pray. There are a number of ways in which this can be dealt with: past experience has shown that it is usually enough to simply inform the lecturer/demonstrator at the beginning of a session that it will be necessary to leave at a certain time. Having done so, students should attempt to minimize disruption to others as much as possible when leaving and so it would be recommended to sit close to an exit.

2.4 Physical Examinations of fellow students

Note: For physical examinations on patients please see section 4.4

Students may be asked to perform certain physical examinations on each other, such as reflex testing, blood pressure measuring, blood taking, etc. which will require students to uncover their forearms, knees, ankles, etc. Such requests may occur in CBM, small group work, anatomy and physiology practicals. If students are uncomfortable with this there are a number of ways in which this can be dealt with: if possible, students should request to be paired-up with a student of the same gender. Some placements or small group tutorials in anatomy and physiology may allow female students to perform physical examinations on each other in a separate room or a screened cubicle area. However, regarding blood pressure measuring and testing reflexes of the arm specifically, female Some Muslim students in the past describe being allowed to wear clothing of thin material that has loose fitting sleeves so that these examinations can be performed over the garment itself. Providing that the pulse can be palpated through the garment, this may be acceptable to clinical supervisors/lecturers. Medical students should note, however, that many doctors, especially in an exam setting, would penalise a student for taking a *patients* blood pressure or eliciting a reflex through a *patients* clothing.

Situations may arise where students will be encouraged to perform chest/abdominal examinations on their peers in order to enhance their clinical skills. In such a situation, students should request to examine a member of the same gender. However, if this is not possible, students should – politely – explain to the relevant member of staff why they would be unable to carry out such an examination on a fellow student. As it is important to practice examination techniques as much as possible before approaching patients, any suitable arrangements students could make within their group to facilitate this would be viewed in a very positive light. The exception to this is for students on the BSc Physiotherapy, where full examination on peers is a compulsory part of the course. Students are able to undertake the necessary skills development working with a partner of the same gender in a screened area of the practical rooms on request.

2.5 The Friday Prayer (Juma')

It is required of all Muslim males that they observe the Friday prayer that, unlike other prayers, must be in a congregation.

At present there are two areas on/near the University campus where the Friday prayer can be performed:

- St. Francis Hall (adjacent to the Guild): Prayer begins at approximately 1.15pm and ends at 1.50pm. Organized by the Birmingham University Islamic Society (BUISOC).
- Queen Elizabeth Hospital: Prayer begins at approximately 1.15pm and ends at 1.45pm. Co-organized by the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Chaplaincy Service.

Written by Dr June Jones, College Lead on Religious and Cultural Diversity, in collaboration with staff and Muslim students from the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. August 2012. 4

Students should note that the timings given are merely estimates and are likely to change on a weekly basis.

2.5.1 Performance of the Friday Prayer during Teaching Hours

The University paper, *Accommodating Students' Religious Observances* acknowledges that:

Pressure on the academic timetable and on teaching space can mean that these times are included in the student working week. Although the nature of a particular course or placement may prevent this, wherever possible, the Schools and Departments should attempt to accommodate Muslim students, who so wish, to pray during the Friday noon period.
(p.3)

Should a teaching session be scheduled to take place at the same time as the Friday prayer, male students should inform the lecture/demonstrator that they will be required to leave during the class. Again, it is the student's own responsibility to catch up with any work missed.

2.6 Materials Permitted for Written Examinations

Please note, students are prohibited from taking any material into the examination venue which is not authorised for completion of the examination paper. This includes religious texts and prayer cards.

3. Issues Affecting students on campus and on clinical placements

3.1 Face Veil (Niqab)

The Medical School Code of Conduct¹ states:

I confirm that I will expose my face fully to patients, teachers and colleagues at all times, except when I am required to wear a protective face mask. (s.6.4, p.10)

¹ The Medical School Code of Conduct is available at <http://webct-cluster.bham.ac.uk/webct/cobaltMainFrame.dowebct?appforward=/webct/viewMyWebCT.dowebct>. All students would be recommended to familiarize themselves with this document.

Thus, for purposes of identification and security, every student is required to show their face at all times. In addition, leaving the face uncovered is vital for communication with patients and staff, particularly for those with hearing impairments as lip-reading and facial expressions facilitate interaction and understanding. Therefore students are not permitted to wear the face veil (*niqab*). The wearing of the headscarf (Hijab) is permitted. Nursing students are likewise not permitted to wear a face veil but may wear the Hijab. In clinical practice students must comply with the Trusts Uniform Policy.

3.2 Eid

In October 2006 the University produced a paper entitled *Accommodating Students' Religious Observances*², which, amongst other things, detailed the University guidelines regarding observance of religious festivals. The document states that students must obtain permission if they wish to be absent from a period of required attendance. MBChB Students must notify the Student Development and Support Office of any planned absence as early as possible, but at least one week in advance by completing an authorized absence form. Students on other courses must notify the Programme Director by completing a prior Leave of Absence form. BSc Physiotherapy students must complete the request for prior approval of absence and return this to the programme director. As the precise date of Eid is unknown due to the Islamic calendar being lunar, it is recommended for students to give two possible dates on which Eid may fall, and take the correct day off accordingly. It is the student's own responsibility to catch up with any work missed. Should Eid potentially fall on a clinical attachment day/clinical placement please warn your tutor/UGC/Practice Placement Manager as soon as possible that you may be absent, explaining that it will be one of two days but this will not be known until the day before Eid.

With regards to examination dates, the University makes every effort to prevent examinations coinciding with religious festivals. Nevertheless, due to time constraints, this may not always be possible. If an exam is timetabled on the date of a religious festival, please contact the appropriate member of staff: Dr June Jones for MBChB, Paul Jepson, Examinations Officer BSc Physiotherapy, who will speak with the appropriate staff to discuss whether changes can be made. Students should note that any authorized absence becomes void should it fall on the day of an examination.

Submission dates for projects and essays are published well in advance and so if students are unable to come in on that day due to Eid; it is their responsibility to submit the piece early.

3.3 Ramadan

3.3.1 Breaking the Fast

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, where Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink between dawn and dusk. As the fast must be broken as

² Available at <http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/Policy/cop/religious%20observance.pdf>

soon as sunset occurs this may result in students having to excuse themselves from a teaching session to eat or drink a small amount (as well as perform the daily sunset prayer). Students should remember not to eat in areas where food and drink must not be consumed normally, particularly anatomy rooms. It would be preferable to simply inform the lecturer/demonstrator at the beginning of the session that it will be necessary to leave for a short while during class.

3.3.2 Travel to Clinical Placements during Ramadan

Though the College of Medical and Dental Sciences is aware that long distance travel may become considerably more difficult for students who are fasting, particularly for those without recourse to personal transportation, it would be impossible for the College of Medical and Dental Sciences to reallocate all fasting students to closer placements solely for the duration of Ramadan.

4. Issues Affecting Students during clinical placements

4.1. Performance of Prayers during clinical placement

If the entire day is spent on a clinical placement, students may find themselves having to perform several prayers there. Although most placements will try to accommodate students request for a small break in which to perform the prayer, they are unlikely to be aware of the need for this unless asked. Students are therefore advised to discuss this with their placement supervisor/Practice Placement Manager or mentor at the beginning of the placement so that suitable arrangements can be made with regards to a day's activities. Crucially, if arrangements have been made for the student to see a patient, the patient must not be kept waiting; prayers should be performed at the earliest convenient time. As a side note, students would do well to take a compass with them to the practice.

4.2 Performance of the Friday Prayer (*Juma'*)

Clinical placements which take place on a Friday will coincide with the day on which Muslim males must perform the mid-day prayer in congregation. Due to the nature of various clinical placements, students can be on placement anywhere across the West Midlands and although in most situations students will be in close proximity to an area in which the Friday prayer can be performed (Mosque, community centre, etc.); this may not always be the case. MBChB students are emailed in January about any requests for special placements in the following academic year. Students may submit a request to be near a place of worship specifically for the Friday Prayer. As there are

a limited number of placements that offer teaching, solutions are not always guaranteed, however course leaders will try to aid students in this situation. Students should refer to their relevant course handbook for guidance on how to request or change a placement.

If there is an appropriate location to perform the prayer close to the placement, students are strongly advised to contact their placement manager before starting the placement, as breaks in the day's schedule will have to be worked out accordingly. Also, students should ask their placement manager beforehand not to book patients over the hour long period in which they intend to be absent, as patient visitation dates may be set weeks in advance. For students to simply turn up on the day and ask to be excused, having made no prior arrangements for this with their placement manager would most likely be deemed to constitute unprofessional practice.

4.3 Shaking Hands

Communication skills are important for developing a good professional-patient relationship and so the College of Medical and Dental Sciences continually examines these skills throughout clinically orientated courses. Shaking hands with the patient is seen as an important step in building a rapport in which the patient feels comfortable. It is not essential for students to begin or end a consultation with a handshake with the patient. However, if the patient attempts to initiate a handshake it is recommended that students reciprocate the gesture. To refuse to shake hands when the patient clearly wants a handshake is contrary to professional behaviour and interaction.

Note: The necessity of arriving at a diagnosis via examinations involving physical contact is fully understood and agreed upon by College of Medical and Dental Science Muslim students. The issue of handshaking is seen as a separate matter: in which it is preferable that contact between the opposite sexes be avoided if possible.

4.4 Examination of patients

Examination of a patient is of obvious importance in clinically orientated courses. The MBChB Code of Conduct requires that all students confirm that:

I am willing to physically examine patients (which includes touching) in order to establish a clinical diagnosis irrespective of the gender, colour, culture, beliefs, disability, or disease of the patient. (s.6.7, p.12)

Hence, students cannot refuse to examine a patient. As consistent with professional codes of practice, students must gain informed consent prior to performing a physical examination or other required aspects of patient care.

4.5 'Out of hours' work

Written by Dr June Jones, College Lead on Religious and Cultural Diversity, in collaboration with staff and Muslim students from the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. August 2012. 8

Students will be required to work outside of '9-5' during clinical placements on a number of occasions, in which they will be expected to stay at the Hospital or community setting until late evening. This may pose a problem for students if this occurs during the month of Ramadan, as special prayers are performed after dusk during this month. Students may wish to have their evening schedule rearranged by contacting the Undergraduate Coordinator (*see section 5.1 Contact Information*) or Programme Director

4.6 Procedure for Operating Theatres

- a) Scrubbing Up: Students are expected to learn and then demonstrate the correct manner in which to don surgical dress. This will involve exposing the arms whilst washing, which may be problematic for female students if being supervised by a male. It is therefore recommended for these students to inform their Hospital Trust Clinical Sub-Dean/Practice Placement Manager of their requirement to be observed by a female nurse whilst scrubbing up. This would be most easily facilitated by students arriving early to the operating theatre.
- b) Surgical Dress: Female students are permitted to wear headscarves in theatre provided that they are covered by an orthopaedic cap; however, the headscarf must be cleaned and washed after every theatre attendance. With regards to the full surgical uniform, students should seek permission from their Hospital Undergraduate Coordinator/Practice Placement manager to wear a scrub gown over the normal theatre dress, so as to provide the same amount of covering as outside of theatre.

Note: The specific provisions made for students will vary across the Hospital Trusts and students should therefore ensure that their modified surgical dress is in accordance with the particular Trust's policy.

4.7 'Bare Below the Elbows' Dress Code

In September 2007, the Department of Health (DoH) set out a range of measures to combat the rising incidence of hospital acquired infections, including the introduction of a 'bare below the elbows' dress code for health care providers involved in clinical activity. These measures were supported by a paper³ in which the DoH provided guidance for the application of these policies locally. The paper concluded that:

Not all staff need to wear uniforms, and it seems unlikely that uniforms are a significant source of cross-infection. Nevertheless, the way staff dress will send messages to the patients they care for, and to the public. It is sensible for Trusts to consider what messages they are trying to

³ Department of Health. An evidence base for developing local policy. London: DOH, 2007. Available at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_078433?IdcService=GET_FILE&dID=148636&Rendition=Web

convey, and to advise on dress codes accordingly. Both infection control and public confidence should underpin a Trust's uniform policy, but the two are not necessarily interchangeable.

Recognising the potential impact that such a policy may have on certain faith groups, the DoH subsequently published a revised Equality Impact Assessment⁴, which urged local authorities to be flexible in their application of the policy:

... in order to support staff in complying with both the needs of the service, and the requirements of their religious dress codes.

Furthermore, in January 2008, the DoH met with numerous Muslim chaplains and scholars to discuss specific implications of the new policy for Muslim health care providers. Clarifying their earlier position, the DoH stated that clinicians need only expose a part of their forearms during periods of clinical contact with patients (e.g. by rolling up their sleeves when examining a patient; as well as for hand washing before and after). Effectively, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the arms may remain covered at all times. Outside of these points of contact, some Trusts allow staff to wear full sleeves as before, other Trusts require that the lower forearm remain exposed during the clinical placement each day

The majority of Hospital Trusts to which Birmingham students are attached have indicated that the practices outlined in the paragraph above are in concordance with their current policies. Students are reminded that they must comply with local Trust policy whilst on their clinical placements. Students who experience any difficulties with regards to this matter are advised to contact Dr June Jones in the first instance. (*see section 5.1 Contact Information*)

In March 2010 the DoH issued further guidance to Trusts, asking that each one undertake an equality and diversity impact assessment regarding their uniform and work wear policy. The DH has asked Trusts to investigate ways in which staff can wear long, tight fitting sleeves which can be rolled up prior to clinical contact and hand washing. It has also instructed that the use of disposable long sleeved gloves is to be investigated. Students are reminded that whilst in the Trusts they must obey Trust policy.

⁴ Department of Health. Equality Impact Assessment – Uniform Guidance. London: DOH, 2008. Available

at:http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_078433?IdcService=GET_FILE&dID=162876&Rendition=Web

Written by Dr June Jones, College Lead on Religious and Cultural Diversity, in collaboration with staff and Muslim students from the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. August 2012. 10

5. Course specific information

5.1 MBChB

5.1.1 Tutor Group Meetings

The MBChB provides welfare support for each student in the form a personal mentor. Students share the tutor with a ‘family’ of students drawn from across all the years. The aim of this program is to provide all students with a network of support and advice that can be accessed, whenever necessary, throughout the course.

Students should be aware that certain tutor group meetings are compulsory and these meetings are usually held within the Medical School building. However, as the system is designed to introduce students to one another, there will be occasions where the tutor organizes ‘social’ gatherings at restaurants, public houses, etc. Attendance at these sessions is usually left to the student’s own discretion; though there may be times when compulsory meetings are also held at such venues. If this situation arises, it would be recommended for students to contact their personal mentor to raise the issue with them and offer suitable alternative venues for socials. As mentioned before, non-attendance is a serious breach of MBChB policy. Personal mentors are informed that it is not acceptable to hold a meeting in a venue that is not suitable for all students. The ‘social’ part of the meeting is not compulsory, but equally should not be held somewhere that excludes any student from attending. Speak to your liaison student or mentor to suggest venues that are acceptable to all.

5.1.2 Tutor Group Meetings in Ramadan

Special prayers are performed after dusk during the month of Ramadan and students may find that these clash with a meeting of their tutor group. If this is the case, students should contact their personal tutor and inform them of the situation, rather than just skipping the meeting. The Medical School looks upon non-attendance of tutor group meetings very seriously.

6. Major festivals of the Islamic calendar

Please note, some dates may vary slightly as they are determined by the lunar calendar

Muslim calendar for 2012

Feb Sat 4

Milad un Nabi (Sunni-Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad)

Feb Thu 9

Milad un Nabi (Shia- Birthday of the Prophet Muhammed)

Jul Fri 20

Ramadan (start)

Aug Sun 19

Eid-UI-Fitr

Oct Fri 26

Eid-UI-Adha

Nov Thu 15

Al-Hijira

Nov Sat 24

Ashura

Muslim calendar for 2013

Jan Thu 24

Milad un Nabi (Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad)

Jan Tue 29

Milad un Nabi (Shia)

Jul Tue 9

Ramadan (start)

Aug Thu 8

Eid-UI-Fitr

Oct Tue 15
Eid-UI-Adha

Nov Mon 4
Al-Hijira

Nov Wed 13
Ashura

7. Contact Information

College Lead on Religious and Cultural Diversity:

- *Dr June Jones – J.Jones.1@bham.ac.uk; 414 2532*

Birmingham University Islamic Society (BUISOC)

- *islamic@bugs.bham.ac.uk*
http://www.buisoc.co.uk

MBChB specific:

Student Development and Support Office:

- *Penny Hewlett – P.Hewlett@bham.ac.uk; 414 5318*

Community Based Medicine:

- *Dr. Kate Thomas – C.P.Thomas@bham.ac.uk; 414 3352*

Hospital Undergraduate Coordinator:

- Please refer to: *http://www.medicine.bham.ac.uk/schooloffice/internal/mbchb/yr5-0506/Comm/index.htm*

Nursing specific:

Helen Gardner - Programme Director 4144562 h.e.gardner@bham.ac.uk

Eloise Nolan - Welfare Tutor (Nursing) 4146659 e.nolan@bham.ac.uk

Sarah Perrott - clinical placement contact 4148383 s.perrott@bham.ac.uk

Physiotherapy specific:

Dr Jill Ramsey – Programme Director - 0121 415 8607 ramsirez@adf.bham.ac.uk

Carol Rowe - welfare tutor – 0121 415 8595 - rowec@adf.bham.ac.uk