

CLINICAL REFERENCE CARD

Interfaith Quick Reference: End of Life

A starting point, never an ending point. Always ask the patient and family directly. Tradition-level summaries do not replace individual conversation.

| Tradition | Pop. | Core Belief at EOL | Key Practices / Needs | After Death | Autopsy |
|---------------------|--------|---|--|--|--|
| Christianity | 2.4B | Resurrection; eternal life | Anointing of Sick (Catholic — call priest); prayers; scripture; communion. Protestant: prayers, hymns, pastoral visit. | No restrictions; burial or cremation. Catholic: prefers burial. Funeral Mass common. | Generally accepted |
| Islam | 1.9B | Return to Allah; Akhirah (afterlife) | Shahada at death; face Mecca; imam; ghusl by Muslim community. Modesty critical. | Burial within 24 hours ; cremation prohibited. Body washed by same-gender Muslim. | Discouraged unless legally required |
| Judaism | 15M | Pikuach nefesh (life); varies by movement | Shema; Viddui (confession); Shmirah (body not left alone). Chevra Kadisha for preparation. | Burial within 24 hours ; Tahara by Chevra Kadisha only. Do not wash. | Forbidden (Orthodox) unless legally required |
| Hinduism | 1.2B | Samsara; karma; moksha | Pandit; Ganga jal (holy water); sacred thread; eldest son present. Tulsi leaf on tongue. | Cremation; family bathes body; eldest son leads rites. Ashes in sacred river. | Discouraged; accepted if required |
| Buddhism | 500M | Impermanence; rebirth; nirvana | Quiet environment; monk/teacher; chanting. Tibetan: body not disturbed 1–3+ hours. | Cremation; do not move body (Tibetan). Consciousness may still be transitioning. | No formal prohibition; ask family |
| Sikhism | 30M | Waheguru's will; seva; mukti | Five Ks remain on body; Ardas; Granthi; Kirtan. Hair/turban must not be cut or removed. | Cremation; Five Ks stay on; ashes in flowing water. Organ donation encouraged. | No prohibition; organ donation encouraged |
| JW | 8.7M | Resurrection to paradise earth | No blood transfusion (document advance directive). HLC support. Memorial at Kingdom Hall. | Burial or cremation; memorial at Kingdom Hall. | Individual decision |
| SBNR | 27% US | Meaning; connection; love; nature | Life review; Dignity Therapy; music; nature; humanist chaplain. Highly individualized. | Varies; natural burial common; organ donation often chosen. | Individual decision |

URGENT ACTIONS

Time-Sensitive Protocols

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| Islam | Burial within 24 hours . Expedite all paperwork. Do not wash body — ghusl by Muslim community. Contact mosque/Islamic funeral home immediately. |
| Judaism | Burial within 24 hours (not on Shabbat). Shmirah — body not left alone. Tahara by Chevra Kadisha only. Do not wash. |
| Buddhism (Tibetan) | Do not move or touch the body without asking. Consciousness may still be transitioning. Ask monk/family how long is needed. |
| Catholic | Anointing of the Sick must be performed while patient is alive. Call priest immediately when death is anticipated. |
| JW | Document blood refusal advance directive on admission. Never administer blood to competent adult who has refused. Contact ethics committee early. |

The One Question That Opens Every Spiritual History:

"Is there anything about your faith, spiritual beliefs, or cultural background that is important for us to know as we care for you?"

Ask on admission. Document the answer. Communicate it to the team.

