

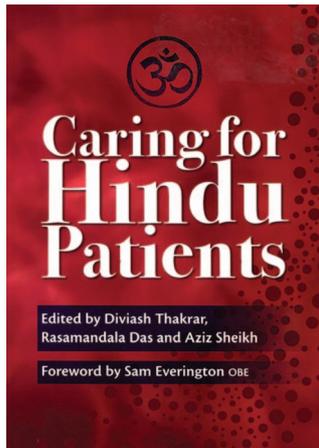
Caring for Hindu Patients

Divish Thakrar, Rasamandala Das and Aziz Sheikh

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For the non-Hindu person, this is a fascinating and easy to read introductory anthology about the Hindu tradition (part one) and various Hindu issues related to health care (part two).

Part one commences with the first chapter 'Hinduism: The tradition speaks for itself', which introduces the fundamental beliefs, values and ideologies of Hinduism touching on its inclusiveness, freedom and tolerance. The chapter then elaborates on the multiple Hindu deities, ways of worship, sacred texts, festivals, pilgrimage and numerous Hindu rites. Interestingly, this chapter traces the origins of the caste system prevalent in India to ancient Hindu scriptures.

The second chapter in this part looks at the social and demographic characteristics of Britain's Hindu population (revealing the text's distinct national bias) and discusses the various phases of migration and the increase of Hinduism in Britain. However, the chapter does not elaborate on the challenges faced by the Hindu population with regard to their spiritual identity when adapting to British culture. Similarly, the possible implications concerning the delivery of health care to people of the Hindu faith have barely been discussed (other than abortion, infertility, death and bereavement). Chapter two concludes that the avoidance to integrate into western neighbourhoods and the establishment of their own communities via the process of chain migration have largely contributed to the upsurge of distinct Hindu communities in Britain.

Part two explores 'The need for cultural sensitivity' regarding Hindu belief and Hindu patients (Chap. 3) and then progresses through the life cycle looking at 'Birth and childhood customs' (Chap. 4), 'Marriage and family life'

(Chap. 5) and 'Death and Bereavement' (Chap. 6). These chapters discuss numerous case studies covering the health implications of various Hindu specific concepts. In particular, Chapter 5 takes on the drawbacks and improvements with the Hindu marriage system, the views of traditional Hindus about modern requirements of confidentiality and the specific problems to be expected with managing abortion and infertility for Hindu patients. Chapter 6 features Hindu beliefs that guide them to prepare their mind spiritually before death and makes relevant suggestions to hospital staff providing terminal care to Hindu patients. However, it is important to note that some of the issues discussed by the authors as being relevant to the care process may be more of an Indian cultural phenomenon and do not necessarily correspond to Hindu spirituality.

The book concludes with several very helpful appendices that list the 'important Hindu deities' (App. 1), the 'twelve important Hindu festivals' (App. 2), 'important Hindu groups represented in the UK' (App. 3), 'Hindu resources on the world wide web' (App. 4), and a fascinating extended appendix on 'dietary leaflets' (App. 5), which is almost a mini-cookbook providing an acceptable contemporary and delicious Hindu diet that discusses the benefits of regular Hindu vegetarian meals to manage nutritional deficiencies. (The reader will probably feel like visiting a Hindu supermarket or restaurant after reading this appendix!) The text also has a glossary and index.

Several professionals have contributed to this book, namely an anthropologist, dietician, obstetrician, internal medicine resident, community science researcher and five general practitioners. There is also a freelance journalist and a broadcaster. Unfortunately, the book does not seem to have any contributions from a Hindu 'priest'. Additionally, the authors do not adequately discuss any Hindu-specific strategies adopted by the National Health Service to improve their service delivery to Hindu patients (e.g. organizing Hindu immigrant doctors, Hindu Prabhus, Gurudevas or Swamijis). Also, the text has failed to address issues concerning the acceptance and utilisation, by Hindu migrants, of their new host country's Western public health care system and its related services.

Nevertheless the text (with its very useful key point summaries at the end of each chapter) is a valuable book for introducing Hinduism, caring for Hindu patients and the importance of being inclusive of spiritual health; as noted in the foreword by Sam Everington (Barrister and General Practitioner):

To improve the health of our patients, we need to be able to address all the issues which affect their health and wellbeing. This includes not only diseases but also their environment, education, employment and spiritual health (p. vii).

*Hariharan Rathinam, MHA
Tutor/Mentor
School of Public Health
La Trobe University,
Melbourne, Victoria*

*Lindsay Carey, PhD
Lecturer and Research Fellow
Palliative Care Unit
La Trobe University,
Melbourne, Victoria*