

Diversity and Inclusion Newsletter:

Muslim American Awareness and Appreciation Month

For this month's newsletter we will be focusing on Muslim Americans and the Islamic religion. Although not nationally recognized, our neighbors in California have officially designated August as Muslim American awareness and appreciation month! We felt this was a great opportunity to highlight the diversity within our residency and learn from a fellow resident. We would like to thank Ambereen for participating in our 1st D&I Q&A and for providing an enlightening '15 facts' sheet!

Q&A with Ambereen Ahmed-Martinez, MD

Q: *How has your religion affected your world view?*

A: It's taught me to stay humble, trust the process [of life], and stand up for the oppressed.

Q: *People sometimes say 'you know things have improved since 911.' Do you believe Muslim Americans still face discrimination?*

A: Yes. I think there has been some improvement in people's education regarding Islam, but I think Islamophobia was almost just as bad recently under the Trump administration. But I definitely don't get "random searched" at the airport as much as I used to lol.

Q: *Are there any barriers to care for Muslim Americans that we as physicians should know about?*

A: Not that I can think of. I think some Muslim Americans try to find physicians that are also Muslim so they don't have to explain certain aspects of their culture, but I think that's the case with many groups of people. Being familiar with, for example, what Ramadan consists of could probably help reduce some barriers, and also some of the other things I stated in the facts below.

15 facts you may not have known about the Islamic Faith

1. There is limited data on the religious beliefs of the Tucson/Arizona population, but Muslims are about 0.1% of Tucson and 1% of Arizona (however I'm sure there are a lot of populations that don't report their religious beliefs).
2. Most of the Muslims you'll probably come across in the healthcare system in Tucson will most likely be refugee/immigrants from Africa or the Middle East.
3. Ramadan is 30 days. We hold fast from food, water, bad thoughts, mal intent, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset every day for the month. We can't get labs drawn, take medications or do procedures while we're fasting, otherwise it'll break our fast. We can do urine testing though. We are also, on average, very sleep deprived during Ramadan, in addition to being food and water deprived. Because of our lunar calendar (see below), Ramadan occurs at a different time every year in the Gregorian calendar.

4. Male circumcisions are required/custom in Islam. So it's almost expected when you have Muslim patients on MCH to schedule their male newborn for a circumcision.
5. There is obviously variation on this, but Muslims value death. Similar to other Abrahamic religions, our connection and union with God is important. You'll often hear "if Allah wills it...". This guides how end of life discussions go. In general, people are more willing to have less medical intervention as we get older, because it's God's will, and we welcome our union to God and passage into jannah (heaven). So much so, that we wear white at funerals because it's meant to be a joyous/celebratory occasion.
6. Islam is not very different from the other Abrahamic religions. We believe in almost all the same prophets, plus Prophet Muhammad. However, we do not worship Prophet Muhammad.
7. Allah is just the Arabic word for God. Even Arab Christians call their God "Allah." It's not a separate being.
8. Arab and Muslim are not interchangeable. Arab people are a geographic demographic, and Muslims a religious affiliation.
9. Not all Muslims speak Arabic.
10. Islam is the second most populous religion in the world, at 24%, behind Christianity at 29%.
11. The two holidays celebrated in Islam are Eid Al-Adha and Eid Al-Fitr. Eid Al-Fitr is the Eid celebrated at the end of Ramadan. Eid Al-Adha is celebrated at the end of our pilgrimage, Hajj. Eid Al-Fitr celebrates the sacrifices that we've made for God and for ourselves. Eid Al-Adha celebrates the sacrifice Abraham made to God when he followed his commandment to kill his son, Isaac, who was then replaced by a farm animal in gratitude for his submission.
12. Conversion to Islam is very easy. All you have to do is say "There is no God but God, and Prophet Muhammad is his messenger" in Arabic in front of a group of people, and you're done. No classes, no money, nothing.
13. Oftentimes, we plan our day around our prayers.
14. Our sabbath is Friday, which living in America where Friday is a workday, creates a lot of unseen strife/problems for Muslims. Also given that our holidays are not national holidays and usually fall during the work week, we often can't celebrate with family if we're in school or work.
15. Our days are lunar days, a day starts at sunset and ends the next day at sunset. Our calendar is also a lunar calendar.

Alvernon FM Diversity and Inclusion Committee