

## **Policy on religion or belief at Brighton and Sussex Medical School.**

At BSMS we believe that every student should have an equal opportunity to acquire knowledge and prove their ability. The main aim of this document is to provide BSMS students with practical guidance to help fulfil their religious observances appropriately whilst meeting the training requirements of the medical school and the GMC.

### **Areas covered:**

- Legal requirement
- Regular prayers
- Religious festivals
- Dress code
- Physical examination of patients
- Physical examination of peers
- Key resources

### **Legal requirement**

The Equality Act 2010 came into force in October 2010. It applies to providers of vocational training, such as universities. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against people on the grounds of religion or belief. This includes direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

The General Medical Council (GMC) supports a diverse medical student population but also has a statutory responsibility to ensure that doctors trained in the UK are fit to practise medicine. There are core outcomes set in Tomorrow's Doctors that must be met by all graduates regardless of their personal or religious beliefs.

### **Regular prayers**

Students may observe the requirements of their religion and pray at certain times of the day. They should, wherever possible, fulfil their obligation to pray either before or after lectures/classes. If a student intends to miss a session or leave early, this must be discussed beforehand with the lecturer/demonstrator. Missed learning opportunities resulting from participation in prayer and religious festivals must be made up by the student. Students should attend all mandatory teaching which cannot be rearranged.

In relation to regular prayers which fall on mandatory training days for clinical skills, patient simulation or resuscitation training, students are advised to communicate with the clinical skills team or module leader in advance of the training day. The team will then review the timetable or programme of the day and identify opportunities between stations to meet religious observance. It may be possible to allocate students to a particular weekday when training is duplicated.

#### Location of prayer facilities / chaplaincies:

University of Sussex Campus

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/chaplaincy>

University of Brighton, Moulsecoomb campus:

<http://www.brighton.ac.uk/studentlife/religiouslife/worship.php?PageId=662>

Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust:

<http://www.bsuh.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/your-stay-in-hospital/religious-and-spiritual-needs/>

IFCG (Inter faith Contact Group) for Brighton and Hove has contacts for all the locally based faith communities: <http://interfaithcontactgroup.com/>

### **Religious festivals**

#### **Timetabled teaching / learning**

BSMS aims to be flexible where possible in accommodating requests for planned absence to observe religious holidays but cannot guarantee that activities can be rescheduled. If students need time off to observe religious holidays they should complete a Planned Absence form and submit to their Phase Lead detailing the date(s) they would miss for discussion and agreement on plans for retrieving the missed learning.

Students should submit applications for planned leave as soon as they become aware of a festival in which they wish to participate; this form should be completed and submitted to the School Office at least **five working days** prior to a planned absence

#### **Examinations / assessments**

With regards to examination dates, the Medical School makes every effort to prevent examinations coinciding with religious festivals. Nevertheless, due to time constraints, this may not always be possible. Dates for assessments are known well in advance. Students should be proactive in finding out whether their assessments may clash with a festival they wish to observe. It is important that students recognise that they need to take the initiative. If an exam is timetabled on the date of a religious festival, please contact the school office as early as possible, who will speak with the appropriate course staff to discuss whether alternative arrangements can be made. These include the availability of prayer facilities / quarantining etc. Examinations that are timetabled on a single day which coincides with a major religious holiday cannot be rescheduled.

#### **Clinical examinations**

Clinical examinations may be timetabled over a number of days in which case students should apply for planned leave and request to take their exam on a non-festival day to enable them to observe major religious holidays. If the examination occurs only on festival days, it is not possible to rearrange this due to the complexity of staging the

assessment. Clinical examinations that are timetabled on a single day and that clash with a major religious holiday cannot be rescheduled.

### **Timetabling for staff**

Major festivals that should be avoided where possible as they would have a significant impact on staff and student attendance (see interfaith calendar at the end of this document for exact dates):

### **Dress**

The Medical School respects the right for students to adhere to religious and cultural observances or adaptations necessary due to disability. However, working in a clinical environment and meeting patients will bring you into contact with many different people.

For BMBS students the BSMS dress code is laid out in the Student Handbook but the underlying principles are readdressed here.

The BSMS dress code has been designed to ensure:

- Patients feel confident they are being seen by a team of professionals.
- All patients, visitors and staff feel their beliefs are respected. Age group, ethnic origin and religion can influence patients' views on dress and it is important not to cause unnecessary offence or upset to anyone.
- The dangers of infection are minimised.
- To reduce risk of cross-infection (e.g. improved hand hygiene);
- To avoid an unintentional injury to patients (e.g. from wristwatches or jewellery);
- To reduce likelihood of injury to students (e.g. assault – neck chains);

Medical students are expected to adhere to the dress codes and any local policies adopted by NHS organisations in which they are working or studying. These may vary between Trusts, and it is the student's responsibility to check. The key components that may conflict with religious observation are reiterated here:

Students in a clinical setting should be "bare below the elbows" to facilitate effective hand decontamination. Clothing must either be short sleeved or worn with the sleeves rolled up. There may be local policy, such as at BSUH, which allows Muslim women to roll their sleeves back 4 inches as agreed with the local Imam. This does not apply within theatres, where all staff and students must be bare below the elbows.

Your face must be fully visible for the purposes of recognition and communication with patients and staff. Head dresses worn as part of religious observance must not cover the face.

Jewellery (for students involved in direct clinical care):

No rings except plain wedding band

- No wristwatches or bracelets (except medical alert bracelets)
- No visible neck chains
- No visible ankle chains
- No more than one pair of plain, discreet ear studs. It is not permitted for staff to wear spikes, rings or bars.
- Visible body piercing must be discreet, appropriate sized studs are permitted at the individual's risk

If this code is not adhered to by students they may be asked to leave that clinical session and this will be recorded as an absence.

### Physical examination of patients (BMBS students)

Students are required to examine physically patients of both sexes (which includes touching and intimate examinations) in order to establish a clinical diagnosis, irrespective of the gender, culture, beliefs, disability, or disease of the patient. In order to qualify as a doctor in the UK, it is required that the practitioner is willing to examine any patient as fully and as intimately as is clinically necessary.

### Physical examination of peers (other medical students)

During the programme, students are expected to participate in a number of anatomical and clinical examinations. These involve physical examination by, and of, their peers. These sessions offer a valuable educational experience and an opportunity for students to acquire and practise their skills. All sessions involving student demonstration or peer examination will be supervised or chaperoned. Sessions will not involve intimate or invasive procedures. Students will not be treated unfavourably if they decline to participate, but this should be discussed with the module leader before the session.

#### Phase 1: Living anatomy

In the living anatomy sessions within the 'system-based' modules in Phase 1, students are expected to come suitably dressed so that surface markings can be made on the skin and appropriate palpation be made. As a general rule, men should wear a T-shirt or top that can be removed to expose a bare chest. Women should also wear a top that can be removed, leaving a sports bra, cropped top or similar. The medical school expects both female and male students to fully participate in these learning sessions and be prepared to be palpated; however, students who have a specific reason for not wishing to participate should speak to the Head of Anatomy **before** the session.

#### Phase 1: Clinical Practice

There are clinical examination sessions in the Clinical Practice modules where students also palpate colleagues to gain experience of required examination skills. If there are situations in which students have a specific reason for not wishing to participate, they should contact the module leader concerned well before the session so that, where appropriate, alternative arrangements can be made.

### Monitoring

All course administrators will keep a record of all student requests for religious accommodations to be made on that student's file. This information will include:

- the student's programme
- the student's religion or belief
- the nature of the accommodation requested
- if the accommodation was made, how so
- if not, why not – so as to record the 'objective justification' to making such an accommodation should the institution receive a legal challenge.

### Key resources

University of Brighton policy on religious observance and exam arrangements

[https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/reg/acs/docs/Religious\\_observance\\_and\\_exam\\_arrangements.pdf](https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/reg/acs/docs/Religious_observance_and_exam_arrangements.pdf)

ACAS a guide for employers and employees: religion or belief and the workplace.

[http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/f//religion\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/f//religion_1.pdf)

Interfaith calendar: <http://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>

Brighton and Sussex Medical School student handbook: all phases (available through Studentcentral).

[https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course\\_id=78820\\_1&content\\_id=1722382\\_1&mode=reset](https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=78820_1&content_id=1722382_1&mode=reset)

General Medical Council. Outcomes for Graduates (2019). Available from:

[http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/undergrad\\_outcomes.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/undergrad_outcomes.asp)