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**Table 1: Practical measures to consider when caring for Jewish patients**

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**Religious observance:** Try to determine the patient's degree of orthodoxy (observance). This information may help to determine the degree of adherence to Jewish laws, including dietary laws. Orthodox men will usually wear a head covering (yarmulke) at all times. Explore the needs for prayer and, whenever possible, facilitate such participation. During special "high holidays" (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) Jewish patients may want to have access to special religious services. Orthodox Jews should not "work" on the Sabbath (Saturday); however, necessary medical activities can be performed on the Sabbath. During Passover, special foods (unleavened bread) may be required. The patient may want to consult a rabbi when medical recommendations are made that affect dietary restrictions.

**Diet:** Many Jews, particularly Orthodox Jews, adhere to a strict diet of kosher food. If it is unavailable in hospital, patients may choose to bring kosher food from home. Some of the dietary principles include not eating pork or seafood and not mixing dairy and meat products. Six hours must pass before an Orthodox Jew can eat meat after a dairy meal. Usual dietary restrictions may be waived if necessary for medical reasons. Feeding is considered important, even in the late stages of disease, and therefore families may be reluctant to agree to the withholding of food unless the patient is in the dying process.

**Privacy and modesty:** Whenever possible, very personal care should be provided by a health care professional of the same sex, especially for female patients. Married Orthodox women may wear a wig in public as part of their adherence to the principle of modesty.

**Consent:** In general, the process of consent used in Western countries is also applicable to Jewish patients. Orthodox Judaism requires that a patient follow medical directions, but it is also expected that the best information be disclosed before the patient agrees to a procedure or treatment. Judaism promotes a strong commitment to the sanctity of life; as a result, there may be some difficulties when discussions take place about the withdrawal or withholding of treatments.

**Rabbinical advice:** Jewish people have a long tradition of asking a rabbi for advice when faced with difficult decisions. Families may present physicians with the results of rabbinical deliberations, which must be taken into account when decisions are made. It is always best to ask the patient or family if they would like the advice of a rabbi.

**Life history:** Many older Jewish patients may be Holocaust survivors. It is important to know this because such a history may affect their response to proposed treatments and their relationships with family members.

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