



Supporting Muslim students during Ramadan

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Dear Editor

We work at one of the UK's newest medical schools, where a high proportion of our students are Muslim. As we approach Ramadan, we reflect on what we can do to support them.

Ramadan is the holiest month in the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast from food and water between dawn and sunset. For many, it's a time of spiritual reflection, community, and drawing closer to God.

Medical education's hidden curriculum prizes physical endurance. Long shifts without breaks. Teaching over lunch. Socialisation around food. For fasting learners, this is a problem. The challenge is not overt discrimination. It's what goes unsaid. Fasting learners may hesitate to ask for accommodations, fearing it makes them look weak. Educators want to help but worry about seeming presumptuous. So both sides stay quiet, and the learner advocates alone.

Consider how much informal learning happens over food: the lunch meeting with career advice, the ward round with coffee, the debrief after a difficult case. A fasting student can't fully participate. Over a month, this wears on you.

What's helped? Simple things. A conversation initiated by the educator four weeks out: 'Ramadan's coming up. Want to look at the rota together?' This signals respect and stops the learner explaining themselves repeatedly. Moving demanding teaching to the morning helps, since alertness dips by late afternoon. A borrowed office near the ward for sunset prayer removes a barrier rotating students otherwise face alone.

This conversation need not come only from Muslim educators. Non-Muslim colleagues in senior roles can raise it too, ideally collaborating with fasting students and staff through structures such as workforce race equality networks. When a non-Muslim educator initiates the conversation, it signals that support is a shared institutional responsibility.

When educators frame accommodations as equity measures, comparable to flexibility for childcare or health appointments, resentment is rare.

Support also flows both ways. Muslim students and staff can invite non-Muslim colleagues to iftar, the meal that breaks the fast. In some hospitals, open iftar events

are organised through the workforce race equality network, with invitations extended to all employees. When non-Muslims experience iftar first-hand, accommodations feel less abstract.

We haven't evaluated these approaches formally. But the principle seems transferable: inclusive training requires educators to start the conversation rather than waiting to be asked. That's true for Ramadan, and for colleagues observing Yom Kippur, managing illness, or navigating family crises [1].

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Reference

1. Anum-Addo SY, Hippolyte J, Barber A, et al. Shifting the Paradigm in Workforce Diversity: Prioritizing an Inclusive Environment in Graduate Medical Education. *Academic Medicine*. 2024 Dec;99(12S):S35.

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