

# Religious and Ethical Position

## on medical therapy and related matters

Jehovah's Witnesses love life and do whatever is reasonable in order to prolong it. They seek out quality health care and accept the vast majority of medical treatments.



### Abortion

Deliberately induced abortion simply to avoid the birth of an unwanted child is the willful taking of human life and is unacceptable to Jehovah's Witnesses. If at the time of childbirth a choice must be made between the life of the mother and that of the child, it is up to the parents or legal guardians to make that decision.

### Alcohol, narcotics, and medications

The Bible does not prohibit the moderate use of alcoholic beverages. (Deuteronomy 14:26; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Timothy 5:23) Scriptural principles of moderation and respect for one's life and mental faculties would rule out substance abuse, such as the use of tobacco and recreational drugs. The medical use of drugs under the supervision of a physician, including narcotics for severe pain, is a personal matter.

### Autopsies and dissections

The appropriate relative(s) decides if an autopsy is advisable to determine the cause of death.

### Autotransfusion (See chart inside.)

Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept preoperative autologous blood donation. However, autotransfusion tech-

niques such as hemodilution, cell salvage, heart-lung machine, and hemodialysis are matters for personal decision. Pumps should be primed with nonblood fluids. Epidural blood patches, plasmapheresis, blood-cell tagging, and autologous platelet gel may also be acceptable. Health-care providers should determine in advance what products or procedures are acceptable to each patient.

### Birth control (contraception)

The Scriptures do not prohibit birth control. Married couples privately and responsibly determine if they will employ appropriate methods of family planning. However, Witnesses reject contraceptive methods that are abortive.

### Blood fractions (See chart inside.)

The religious understanding of Jehovah's Witnesses does not absolutely prohibit the use of fractions derived from the primary components of blood, such fractions as albumin, immunoglobulins, clotting factors, and hemoglobin solutions. Health-care providers should determine in advance what products or procedures are acceptable to each patient.—See "Immunoglobulins and Serums" and "Transfusion-Alternative Strategies."

#### QUICK FACT

Jehovah's Witnesses have a wide range of views regarding the use of fractions derived from the primary components of blood. Clinicians should ascertain each patient's choice in advance.

## **Blood transfusion** (See chart.)

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that blood transfusion is prohibited by such Bible passages as the following: "Only flesh with its soul—its blood—you must not eat." (Genesis 9:3, 4) "[You] must in that case pour its blood out and cover it with dust." (Leviticus 17:13, 14) "Abstain . . . from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood." (Acts 15:19, 20) While those verses are not stated in medical terms, Witnesses view them as ruling out transfusion of whole blood, red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. Witness patients request treatment using alternatives to blood transfusion.—See "Transfusion-Alternative Strategies."

## **QUICK FACT**

Jehovah's Witnesses do not practice faith healing.

## **Bone-marrow transplant**

Since the Bible does not consider bone marrow equivalent to blood, the decision to accept a bone-marrow transplant is a personal one.—Isaiah 25:6.

## **Child discipline, neglect, and abuse**

Child neglect or abuse has no justification. Discipline in the sense of instruction, training, and loving correction is vital in molding the lives of young children.

## **Circumcision**

Early in the history of first-century Christianity, circumcision ceased to be a religious issue. (1 Corinthians 7:19) Thus, today, in the case of a young son, this is a personal matter for the parents to decide. The custom of subjecting young girls to female genital mutilation is viewed as a cruel, unnecessary practice.

## **Decision making and informed choice**

Jehovah's Witnesses actively seek medical care when needed. Many courts have recognized the patient's fundamental right of bodily self-determination in medical decision-making and have protected patient autonomy under the principle of informed consent or informed choice in health care. In some countries this also extends to mature adolescents.

The patient (or parents/guardians of minors) should be fully informed of diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment recommendations so that informed health-care deci-

sions can be made. Parents have the natural and legal right to make such decisions for their minor children.

## **Dietary laws and beliefs**

Jehovah's Witnesses abstain from eating blood and unbled meat. (Acts 15:20, 28, 29) Aside from this Biblical injunction, as a group they observe no other dietary restrictions.

## **Euthanasia**

See "Prolongation-of-Life and Right-to-Die/Living Wills or Advance Directives."

## **Immunoglobulins and serums**

The religious understanding of Jehovah's Witnesses does not absolutely prohibit the use of fractionated blood products. Each Witness must decide whether he can accept immunoglobulins or serums made with a blood fraction.

## **Organ donation/Transplantation**

While the Bible specifically forbids consuming blood, no Biblical command pointedly forbids the taking in of tissue or bone from another human. Therefore, whether to accept an organ transplant or make an organ donation is a personal medical decision.

## **Pastoral care**

Jehovah's Witnesses provide spiritual comfort and practical assistance to fellow Witnesses during periods of illness or hospitalization. Patient Visitation Groups, composed of qualified ministers, have been established in most major cities.

## **Plasmapheresis**

When a plasma substitute (e.g., artificial colloid) is used, the use of plasmapheresis is a personal matter for each Witness patient to decide. Allogeneic plasma is unacceptable to Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **Prolongation-of-life and right-to-die/Living wills or Advance directives**

Life is sacred. For this reason, reasonable and humane efforts should be made to sustain and prolong life. However, the Bible does not require that extraordinary, complicated, distressing, or costly measures be taken to sustain a dying person. In some cases, the consensus of the attending physicians may be that those measures would merely prolong the dying process and/or leave the patient with no meaningful life. The patient's explicit written or oral instructions should be respected.

# Jehovah's Witnesses' Position on Allogeneic and Autologous Blood

| POSITION               | ALLOGENEIC BLOOD  | AUTOLOGOUS BLOOD   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Refused                | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Whole blood</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Red Cells</p> <p>⋮</p> <p>Fractions from red cells</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hemin</li> <li>• Hemoglobin</li> </ul> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>White Cells</p> <p>⋮</p> <p>Fractions from white cells</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Platelets</p> <p>⋮</p> <p>Fractions from platelets</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Plasma</p> <p>⋮</p> <p>Fractions from plasma</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Albumin</li> <li>• Clotting factors</li> <li>• Fibrinogen</li> <li>• Immunoglobulins</li> </ul> </div> </div> <p>Witnesses make personal decisions on what they can accept in good conscience. <b>It is important to discuss in advance what products or procedures are acceptable to each patient.</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preoperative autologous blood collection and storage for later reinfusion</li> </ul>                                      |
| Potentially acceptable |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acute normovolemic hemodilution</li> <li>• Dialysis</li> <li>• Cardiopulmonary bypass</li> <li>• Blood salvage</li> </ul> |



## Advance Directives and Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Documents

Jehovah's Witnesses carry on their person a legally binding document directing that no blood transfusions be given to them under any circumstances. They prepare this document in accord with local laws. It sets forth their personal wishes regarding blood fractions, procedures involving the use of their own blood, and other medical matters. In some jurisdictions, the patient may also use this document to appoint a substitute decision-maker (health-care agent or representative) who is authorized to make medical decisions or to be consulted on behalf of the patient upon incapacity.

### Religion and healing processes (faith healing)

Jehovah's Witnesses have faith in God but do not practice faith healing.

### Religious sacraments, ordinances, rituals, and customs

Jehovah's Witnesses do not have special rituals that are to be performed for those who are sick or dying. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide comfort for the sick patient through medical assistance and spiritual care.

### QUICK FACT

In many countries, Jehovah's Witnesses designate a representative(s) with legal authority to make decisions or to be consulted in the event of patient incapacity.

## Reproductive technology

Witnesses view in vitro fertilization—where the egg and sperm are derived from individuals who are not married to each other—as comparable to adultery and thus unacceptable. (Leviticus 18:20; Hebrews 13:4) Gestational surrogacy is also unacceptable.

## Stem-cell transplants

Stem cells obtained at the cost of the life of an embryo are unacceptable to Jehovah's Witnesses. However, each patient decides whether to accept stem cells collected from his or her own blood or the blood of another person—provided that blood components are not intentionally collected, stored, and reinfused along with the stem cells.

## Substitute decision maker

In many countries, each Witness patient will decide, according to his or her circumstances and the provisions of the law, whom to designate as substitute deci-

sion maker(s) in case of incapacity. If the patient has appointed a health-care agent or representative in his or her advance directive or durable power of attorney for health care document, the authority of the agent to make decisions on behalf of the incapacitated patient should be respected.—See “Advance Directives and Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care Documents” and “Decision Making and Informed Choice.”

## Tagging (blood-cell labeling)

Some Witness patients will allow a quantity of their blood to be withdrawn and tagged with an agent so as to facilitate various diagnostic tests.

## Transfusion-alternative strategies

Avoiding blood transfusion during medical care involves the systematic use of clinical strategies for managing hemorrhage and anemia. These transfusion-alternative strategies use appropriate combinations of drugs, equipment, and/or medical/surgical techniques to reduce or avoid blood loss and to enhance the patient's own blood production. This approach, using multiple methods for avoiding blood transfusion by a collaborative team, is sometimes referred to as bloodless medicine and surgery, blood conservation, or patient blood management.\*

\* Hospital Liaison Committees for Jehovah's Witnesses can provide information to physicians regarding transfusion-alternative strategies and can arrange for consultations with physicians who have experience in the management of patients without the use of blood transfusion. These committees function in most major cities worldwide.

## QUICK FACT

Many of Jehovah's Witnesses accept autologous blood management techniques such as blood salvage and hemodilution.



## For more information

Jehovah's Witnesses have a worldwide network of more than 1,700 Hospital Liaison Committees (HLC). This network provides authoritative information regarding clinical strategies to avoid blood transfusion and facilitates access to health care for patients who are Jehovah's Witnesses.

To contact a local HLC representative, go to [www.jw.org/en/medical-library](http://www.jw.org/en/medical-library) and click “Contact Local Representative.”

