

Jehovah's Witnesses and Health Care



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**“Continue to prosper
and enjoy good health.”**

—3 John 2

INTEREST IN HEALTH AND WELFARE

Jehovah's Witnesses cherish and deeply respect the gift of life. They carefully consider Bible principles when making choices that affect their physical, mental, and emotional health. They avoid activities that endanger life and resist unhealthy habits, such as substance abuse or tobacco use. (2 Corinthians 7:1) As for medical treatment, they collaborate with health-care professionals to obtain the best care available. Witnesses do not practice the occult or faith healing.

BIBLE-BASED VIEW OF BLOOD

Some patients may refuse blood-based treatments for a variety of reasons, including concerns for their safety. Jehovah's Witnesses do not accept blood transfusions for religious reasons rather than for medical ones. They base their position on the Bible's command to “keep abstaining . . . from blood.” (Acts 15:29) Witnesses believe that this prohibition applies equally to eating blood products and to transfusing blood or its major components.

NONBLOOD MEDICAL TREATMENT

Because of the risks associated with blood transfusions, medical researchers have put considerable resources into developing safe and cost-effective means of treating patients without blood. Many skilled doctors who have treated Jehovah's Witnesses without blood transfusions now practice these demonstrably safer and more effective therapies as the standard of care for all patients.



BENEFITS OF MEDICAL TREATMENT WITHOUT BLOOD TRANSFUSION

On October 2, 2012, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reported: “Hospital patients who are Jehovah's Witnesses—who refuse blood transfusions on religious grounds—actually do better than other patients.” The report cites Clinical Professor James Isbister of the Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney, Australia. “Professor Isbister said Jehovah's Witnesses were given better treatment by doctors trying to preserve their [the Witness patients'] blood. As a result they had better survival rates, and shorter hospital and intensive care stays than people who received blood transfusions during surgery.”

Dr Samuel Mancuso, cardiac surgeon at Policlinico San Donato Hospital, Milan, stated at a 2017 medical conference: “The number of patients that refuse blood transfusions for clinical and medical reasons is increasing. Why? It is not only out of concern for transfusion risks but because of the notion that bloodless medicine is better medicine . . . Therefore, it is not only Jehovah's Witness patients who are requesting this kind of [transfusion-free] procedure.”

Worldwide, an increasing number of doctors respect the self-determination of patients who request nonblood medical treatment.

A patient's right to choose medical treatment is vital to the principles of self-determination and personal autonomy

To support the relationship between doctors and patients, Jehovah's Witnesses have a worldwide network of more than 2,000 Hospital Liaison Committees. This network provides authoritative information regarding clinical strategies to use alternatives to blood transfusion and facilitates access to health care for patients who are Jehovah's Witnesses.

PATIENT'S RIGHTS ON MEDICAL CARE

Self-determination and personal autonomy are the foundation of a patient's right to select medical treatment and to give informed consent. International ethical standards establish that a patient's decision must be respected. A patient has the right to make decisions about whether to accept a blood transfusion or procedures involving the use of his own blood as well as other medical matters.

Jehovah's Witnesses want high-quality medical care for themselves and for their children, including the use of safe and effective nonblood therapies. They appreciate authorities who respect their parental responsibility to choose the best medical options for their children.



PATIENT'S RIGHT ON MEDICAL CARE

"Medicine should first of all be oriented toward respect for the person and his dignity. . . . I think one of the worst violations of someone's dignity is not listening to what the person says. It is like denying one the status of being a human."

—Dr Sergio Fucci, magistrate; former counselor, Milan Appellate Court; honorary chairman, Court of Cassation of Italy

"The principle of patient autonomy reflects that it is a basic human right for an individual to be able to assert control over his or her own body. . . . Medical practitioners must inform their patients about the material risks and benefits of the recommended treatment but it is up to the patient to decide whether to proceed with a particular course of treatment."

—Supreme Court of Namibia,
June 24, 2015

"The interested party . . . is a patient who wishes to live and enjoy her health by means of a surgery that she has been waiting to have for three years . . . [Her rejection of a blood transfusion] is not arbitrary, nor anything meant to prevent the providers from rendering their professional duty. Rather, it is a reflection of the patient's beliefs, which are to be respected in harmony with her right to freedom of conscience and her dignity, even more so when there are favorable reports to perform the surgery without the need for such a transfusion."

—Supreme Court of Chile,
December 13, 2019



LEGAL PROVISIONS

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

- Articles 7, 17.1, and 18.1

The following international and regional human rights instruments outline similar provisions:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 5, 12, and 18
- The American Convention on Human Rights, Articles 5.1, 5.2, 11.1, and 12.1
- The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Articles 3, 8, and 9
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Articles 4, 5, and 8
- The ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, Articles 14, 21, and 22

Each individual examines available treatment options to ensure that they do not conflict with his or her Bible-trained conscience

(Galatians 6:5)

