

NHS withdraws faith-based fasting advice after NSS request for review

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NHS Choices has removed advice which drew heavily on Islamic theology from its website and will consider replacing it after the National Secular Society requested its review.

Earlier this month we [asked](#) NHS Choices to reconsider the contents of a page on its website which purported to advise people on fasting during Ramadan. We said the advice breached its standards of impartiality and commitment to evidence-based information.

The advice included lines such as "children are required to fast when they reach puberty". On the question 'Can I use an asthma inhaler during Ramadan?' it said "Muslim experts have differing opinions on this issue".

It also said breastfeeding mothers should make up for their lack of fasting at a later date, people on dialysis should "perform fidyah" (pay a form of 'compensation' for missing the fast) and it was "a good idea" for children to "practise fasting for a few hours at a time".

NHS Choices said the advice was "put together by medical experts and Islamic scholars and researchers".

In our correspondence we asked NHS Choices to "remove references to theological teachings" to comply with its own stated policy of "providing objective, impartial and evidence-based information on healthcare".

NHS Choices has now taken down the page and told us it will consider how it could "better meet user needs around this topic", including by possibly producing new content.

Dr Antony Lempert, the coordinator of the NSS's Secular Medical Forum, welcomed the decision to withdraw the guidance.

"Whether or not Muslim scholars have differing opinions on health-related issues, it is vital that patients receive accurate, safe medical advice. Some patients, relying on NHS Choices advice, might have put their health at serious risk by not using their asthma inhalers for example.

"All medical advice produced by NHS Choices must be based on best medical practice."

Stephen Evans, the NSS's chief executive, said: "Many British Muslims choose to fast during Ramadan and the NHS may well have a legitimate purpose in producing content for their benefit. But that advice should be impartial and balanced, not based on Islamic theology.

"The advice the NHS has now removed was not appropriate for a secular body relied upon to help patients and the public make informed choices about their health. The NHS is right to review it and we'll keep a close eye on any new advice that it may promote in the future."

The information was last reviewed in 2017 and the next review was not due until April 2020. This year's Ramadan finished last week.

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