

Medical workers in Israel support each other's religious observance

by [Michele Chabin](#) in the [August 3, 2016](#) issue

Stuart Levy, a nurse at a Jerusalem hospital, updates his ward's work schedule several times a week with staffers' vacations, birthdays, and more religious holidays than many people know exist.

"We have 18 hospital beds, and on any given day we may have an Orthodox Jew next to a devout Muslim next to a Catholic next to a Druze next to a Russian Orthodox patient," said Levy, head nurse of the oncology/hematology ward at Hadassah Medical Center. "And many of our staff are religiously observant."

During Ramadan, Levy asked Jewish nurses to work evening shifts to allow Muslim nurses to break their fasts at home. Non-Jewish nurses reciprocate by working on Jewish holidays.

Juggling so many holidays, as well as the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian sabbaths on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, can be a logistical nightmare. But Levy views it as an exercise in empathy.

"There is an unwritten rule at Hadassah that if we can accommodate the needs of people of every faith, we will," he said.

Rula Badarna, a Muslim nurse on the ward, agreed: "We have great cooperation in this department."

Jews compose about 75 percent of Israel's population; Muslims, 17 percent; Christians, 2 percent; and Druze—a religion native to the Middle East that combines a number of traditions—nearly 2 percent. The remaining 4 percent are part of even smaller religious minorities or have no official religion.

Another employer known for its religious sensitivity is United Hatzalah, a national emergency medical response organization. Jewish and Muslim coworkers make a point of not eating in front of one another on their respective fast days, according to Amnon Abadi, operational communications manager.

Muslims work on the Jewish sabbath and holidays to allow some of their Jewish coworkers to take off, while their Jewish coworkers work overtime or the evening shift so their Muslim coworkers can break their Ramadan fasts and celebrate festivals.

“We’ve been working together for years,” said Ramzi Battash, a Muslim dispatcher, in the crowded control room. “We go to each other’s weddings. When we save a life we don’t ask who is Jewish or who is Arab. We are all people.”

Orit Cohen, an Orthodox Jewish nurse at Hadassah, said respect goes far beyond holiday observance: “People deal with death and mourning in very different ways. Bottom line, though, everyone is a human being.”

On Hadassah’s bone marrow transplant ward, staffers and patients are well aware of every terror attack or military action in the news, said Yevgeni Frank Kamenetsky, the head nurse.

“We’re leftists, rightists, Muslims, Christians, Jews,” he said. “But we make it work, even after work. We socialize. We go to the movies together, picnic together.”

Ahmad Shiber, a bone marrow transplant nurse, turns lights and appliances on and off during the sabbath and holidays for Orthodox Jewish patients, whose beliefs prohibit those actions. Similarly, he writes prescriptions on behalf of Jewish staffers on the sabbath.

“Our department is the last resort for patients: many will not survive,” Shiber said. “We understand how fragile life is. Beyond all this political stuff, our patients want to live to see their children get married or have a grandchild. We bleed the same blood. We cry the same tears.” —Religion News Service

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