

# Introduction

The impact of diversity in the provision of health care is almost universally underestimated. The result can be a perpetuation of inequalities and a sense of alienation that patients from different religions and cultures often feel in western societies.

The medical profession needs to embrace diversity in education both in undergraduate and postgraduate medical curricula. For example, when a patient is ill or dying, physicians and other health care professionals should be aware that both the patient's religion and culture can profoundly affect the patient's expectations of care, attitudes to pain and loss, and presented medication.

This issue of *Clinical Cornerstone*<sup>®</sup> seeks to give health care providers an insight into the more common faiths. Knowledge of these faiths, together with an appreciation of communication difficulties and an

understanding of the difference between culture and religion, will help health care providers offer appropriate and more sensitive care to patients of different ethnic backgrounds.

The articles included in this publication touch on some of the more common illnesses affecting ethnic minority patients that clinicians may need to be aware of in everyday practice. Although much of the material in the separate articles is covered at a fairly superficial level for the busy clinician, references for additional reading and pertinent Web sites are provided.

I hope this issue will be a useful resource guide to a fascinating area that remains underresearched.

**Aly Rashid, MD**  
**Guest Editor**