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Pswarayi, Rudo MV

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A Surgeon's Dress Code: The Patients' Perspective

R Pswarayi 1, MBChB; J Loveland 2, MBChB, FCS(SA), Cert Paed Surg(Sa); JWS Devar1, MBChB, FCS(SA), Fellowship Gastro Surg(SA); B Jugmohan1, MBChB, FCS(SA), MMed Surg (Wits), Fellowship Gastro Surg(SA)

1Department of General Surgery, Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

2Department of Paediatric Surgery, Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Corresponding Author: Rudo Pswarayi (rupooh@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

Background: The dress code for surgeons has evolved over time from formal suit-and-tie, to crisp white coat, and currently to various forms of smart-casual attire, but still, there is no stipulated or rigid uniform guideline. It must be of paramount significance to explore and discuss various attire in relation the patients' ideals and perceptions if we are to accurately assess what a South African patient expects and, therefore, perceives of their surgeon.

Study Design: An observational study in the form of a paper-based questionnaire.
Setting: The survey was carried out at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital (CMJAH), Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital (CHBAH) and Wits Donald Gordan Medical Centre (WDGMC).
Objective: Descriptive analysis of the survey responses, and the determination of the association between survey responses and a) Hospital, b) Gender, c) Age group.
Participants: 387 questionnaires were filled out with a total sample size of 376 fully completed and eligible sample used (consenting participants of 18years and older).
Methodology: Fisher's exact test was used where the requirements for the X2 test could not be met. Attire groups with n<15 were not analysed. The strength of the associations was measured by Cramer's V and the phi coefficient respectively. Data analysis was carried out using SAS v9.4 for Windows. A 5% significance level was used. Seven Questions (Q1 – Q7) were posed with various dress categories to select from in each question, namely: 'Formal', 'Smart', 'Smart Casual', and 'Scrubs.
Results: In all 7 questions, 'Scrubs' were the preferred attire. Overall, For Q1-Q5 and Q7, after 'Scrubs', 'Smart' was the next most popular attire. For Q6, after 'Scrubs', 'Smart', 'Smart Casual' and 'Formal' were all popular, indicating some leeway on weekends/public holidays. There was a significant, moderate, association between the responses to the question and hospital

($p<0.0001$; Cramer's $V=0.47$): At CHBAH, patients preferred 'Scrubs' more and 'Smart' attire less, compared to CMJAH and WDGMC. At CMJAH, 'Formal' attire was more preferred compared to the other two hospitals.
Conclusion: As there is no stringent rule of dress code for surgeons, the patients' opinions must, therefore, be considered and have some degree of influence as to how we present ourselves in our working environments. Overall, patients preferred their surgeons to be dressed in scrubs – as this form of attire was found to be easily identifiable and evoked confidence in such attire.