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What to wear today? Effect of doctor's attire on the trust and confidence of patients

[Shakaib U. Rehman, MD^{ab}](#), [Paul J. Nietert, PhD^{bc}](#), [Dennis W. Cope, MD^{de}](#), [Anne Osborne Kilpatrick, DPA^f](#)

Abstract

Purpose
There are very few studies about the impact of physicians' attire on patients' confidence and trust. The objective of this study was to determine whether the way a doctor dresses is an important factor in the degree of trust and confidence among respondents.

Methods
A cross-sectional descriptive study using survey methodology was conducted of patients and visitors in the waiting room of an internal medicine outpatient clinic. Respondents completed a written survey after reviewing pictures of physicians in four different dress styles. Respondents were asked questions related to their preference for physician dress as well as their trust and willingness to discuss sensitive issues.

Results
Four hundred respondents with a mean age of 52.4 years were enrolled; 54% were men, 58% were white, 38% were African-American, and 43% had greater than a high school diploma. On all questions regarding physician dress style preferences, respondents significantly favored the professional attire with white coat (76.3%, $P < .0001$), followed by surgical scrubs (10.2%), business dress (8.8%), and casual dress (4.7%). Their trust and confidence was significantly associated with their preference for professional dress ($P < .0001$). Respondents also reported that they were significantly more willing to share their social, sexual, and psychological problems with the physician who is professionally dressed ($P < .0001$). The importance of physician's appearance was ranked similarly between male and female respondents ($P = .54$); however, female physicians' dress appeared to be significantly more important to respondents than male physicians' dress ($P < .001$).

Conclusion
Respondents overwhelmingly favor physicians in professional attire with a white coat. Wearing professional dress (ie, a white coat with more formal attire) while providing patient care by physicians may favorably influence trust and confidence-building in the medical encounter.

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^a Ralph H. Johnson Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Charleston, SC

^b Department of Medicine, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC

^c Department of Biostatistics, Bioinformatics, and Epidemiology, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC

^d University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) San Fernando Valley Program, Sylmar, Calif

^e Olive View-UCLA Medical Center, Sylmar, Calif

^f Department of Health Administration and Policy, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC.



Requests for reprints should be addressed to Shakaib U. Rehman, MD, Ralph H. Johnson Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Medical University of South Carolina, 214 Historic Drive, Mount Pleasant, SC 29464.

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