

Iran and the United States through partnership and collaboration.

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## New Research

### Preferences for Physician Attire

#### To the Editor:

Only a few recent studies have investigated patients' preference for physician attire.<sup>1-4</sup> Most studies were conducted more than 10 years ago and concluded that patients generally prefer a more traditional dress code for their physician. The purpose of our investigation was to readdress the idea that people still prefer a physician who chooses the traditional style of dress.

We approached men and women in the waiting rooms of four primary care offices in metropolitan Detroit. Patients, friends, and family were eligible. Two of the offices were suburban private family practice centers. One center was urban, and the other was rural. During 1 month, about nine people per week were approached from each office. A total of 120 people completed the survey; the response rate exceeded 90%. The age range was 16-80 years. The mean age was  $37.2 \pm 15.6$  (median 47.5). Sixty-nine (57%) women and 51 (43%) men completed the survey; 62 of the respondents were white, and 51 were African American.

Participants were shown two sets of four photos illustrating a physician model in four different types

of dress. The first set of four photographs showed a young woman wearing jeans with running shoes (photo 1), hospital scrubs (photo 2), a skirt with dress shirt (photo 3), and slacks with dress shirt (photo 4). The second set displayed a young man wearing jeans with running shoes (photo 5), hospital scrubs (photo 6), slacks with a collared shirt (photo 7), and slacks with tie and dress shirt (photo 8). Participants were asked to indicate which

approved of informal items (one-tailed  $\alpha=.025$ ).

The largest proportion of participants preferred a physician wearing formal attire (Table 1). A relatively small proportion of participants preferred the physician wearing casual attire, ie, jeans with running shoes. Body piercing garnered the most disapproval, and an unshaven appearance was less tolerated than a goatee (Table 2). A slim majority disapproved of running shoes or tattoos for both the male and female physician.

There was a fairly consistent relationship between age and disapproval of informal attire items. Participants who were older were more likely to disapprove of all of the informal items worn by the female physician, and all but three of the items worn by the male physician (ie, equal disapproval of unshaven, jeans, and running shoes).

The relationship between gender and disapproval of items was not as pronounced. African American participants were more likely to approve of informal items worn by the male physician, including tattoos and an unshaven appearance ( $P<.05$ ). White participants were more likely to approve

Table 1

#### Overall Proportions Indicating Preference for Physician Attire

##### Preference for female physician attire

- 33% preferred slacks with dress shirt (photo 4)
- 31% preferred skirt with dress shirt (photo 3)
- 23% preferred hospital scrubs (photo 2)
- 14% preferred jeans with running shoes (photo 1)

##### Preferences for male physician attire

- 39% preferred slacks with dress shirt and tie (photo 8)
- 24% preferred hospital scrubs (photo 6)
- 20% preferred slacks with collared shirt (photo 7)
- 16% preferred jeans with running shoes (photo 5)

physician they would feel most comfortable with (Table 1). Additionally, all volunteers were asked their opinion about a variety of informal articles of clothing, fashion accessories, facial hair preferences, and body markings (Table 2). Specifically, they were asked if they approved, disapproved, or had no opinion about visiting a primary care physician who wore each of the informal items listed. Gender and race were analyzed using the chi-square test ( $\alpha=.05$ ). An independent  $t$  test was used to test the hypothesis that the mean age was greater in the group of participants that

items was not as pronounced. African American participants were more likely to approve of informal items worn by the male physician, including tattoos and an unshaven appearance ( $P<.05$ ). White participants were more likely to approve

Table 2

#### Disapproval of Informal Items, by Physician Gender

Informal Item	Female Physician: % of Patients Disapproving of Attire Item	Male Physician: % of Patients Disapproving of Attire Item
Tongue piercing	78	75
Eyebrow ring	74	77
Nose ring	71	75
Jeans	68	63
Tattoos	58	52
Running shoes	53	50
Unshaven (men only)	N/A	43
Earring (men only)	N/A	39
Goatee (men only)	N/A	13

of running shoes worn by the female physician ( $P<.05$ ).

Although many physicians choose to dress casually, patients may prefer a more formal dress code. Participants in this study generally preferred a well-dressed female or male physician. The combination of jeans and running shoes should not be considered appropriate dress for a primary care physician. Most informal attire items identified in this study were not well accepted, and older participants were more likely to disapprove of informal attire items. The results of

this study suggest that primary care physicians should adhere to a formal dress code to make their patients feel more comfortable.

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*Editor's Note:* The letters in this issue of the journal were edited by former editor Victoria Neale, PhD, MPH.