

Good Practice Guidelines Dress Codes

- The preservation of modesty is very important in many cultures, especially remaining covered and behaving quietly in the presence of the opposite gender, strangers and older people.
- In general, being modestly dressed means being covered from waist to knees for men, and having the arms, legs, back and chest covered for women. Most patients from ethnic groups will feel considerably more relaxed if they are able to remain covered up.
- Patients may be reluctant to expose any part of their body during an examination other than the part that is affected. An understanding of this reluctance by the healthcare team will help a patient to relax.
- Dressing gowns and long-length hospital robes with secure ties and long arms allow modesty to be better preserved. Offer patients a dressing gown if there is one available, or suggest that they bring suitable clothing with them (especially when an inpatient, or coming in for tests).
- Many groups, especially women, cover their hair as part of their dress code. Only ask for head coverings to be removed if absolutely necessary, and try to offer patients an alternative to wear in public areas. Treat the removed headgear with respect and keep it safe and clean.
- Jewelry is often a key part of the dress code, especially for women. It may indicate social or marital status or be worn for religious and cultural reasons. As with headgear, ask for its removal only if absolutely necessary, and treat it with respect. Do not lose it.
- Some cultures may require marks to be made on the body for religious reasons or as symbols of marital or social status. These may be permanent or temporary. Only ask for temporary marks to be removed if absolutely necessary.
- For many, clothing worn during religious observance must be clean and in good repair. If a patient has stains on their clothing (blood, fluid), they may require help to get changed before they can pray.
- Think about how you can modify uniforms so that all cultures in your workforce can preserve their traditions of dress. For example, allow Muslim female staff to wear a long-sleeved top under a short-sleeved uniform in order to keep their arms covered.