

A STUDY OF ACCEPTABLE DRESS ATTIRE FOR OPTOMETRISTS.

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## ABSTRACT

*Background:* This research and investigation will utilize a survey to determine the types of dress attire for doctors that are acceptable in practice and specifically the practice of optometry. This will help determine if the way doctors dress is relevant or out of date, based on patients' perspectives. In addition, all optometry schools in the United States will be compared and contrasted regarding their clinic dress codes. *Methods:* A cross-sectional descriptive study using survey methodology was conducted of patients regarding their views on the proper attire for health care providers, specifically optometrists. Respondents were asked whether certain dress attire was acceptable to be worn by their doctors and if they had preferences for certain doctor dress attire. Also, dress codes from all schools will be compared and contrasted for similarities and differences. *Results:* Slacks and a dress shirt with a necktie was the most common acceptable dress attire for male doctors. Professional attire was the most common acceptable dress attire for female doctors. 97.56% of respondents stated it does not matter or would not want to see their doctor in other dress attire. Also, about 89% of those surveyed would not mind if their doctor wore any of the mentioned options of dress attire in the survey. A name tag, white coat, dress shirt and pants with a necktie for male students and professional attire for female students must be worn in all optometry school clinics. *Conclusions:* Although people have their own image of what doctors wear or what they should wear, it is evident that the majority of people would not mind if their doctor wore scrubs, a necktie or no necktie with a dress shirt and slacks, or a suit. All optometry schools have, for the most part, the same dress code for students in clinic.

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## Introduction

There are several different dress attire options for doctors in practice to choose from. Most doctors choose their dress attire from either what they had always worn when they were in school or from what type of practice they are in. There are several other methods of choosing what type of dress attire to wear, but are all options acceptable to wear while practicing? Are different dress attire options acceptable in different modes of health care, or could one fashion of dress attire be acceptable for all types of doctors? These questions have been asked and also have been attempted to be answered. One of the most popular ways to do so is through surveys in which patients are asked their feedback on doctor dress attire. Studies looking at whether scrubs are more professional than a suit or whether wearing a tie is important, including whether wearing a name tag or a white coat is important, have been attempted before.

A study done in 2004 at a clinic in Ohio looked at the way physicians dressed and the preferences of patients towards their physician's dress attire. This study found that 60% of patients did not express a preference for their physician to wear a white coat. Also 63% responded that a physician's specific dress attire did not influence their comfort level with that physician, and 62% did not have their confidence level for their physician influenced by the physician's dress attire. This study also found scrubs with a white coat to be the favored response of what a physician should wear and casual dress to be the least favorite response(1).

A more recent study, completed in 2005, shows what patients at an outpatient clinic prefer their physicians dress attire to be. 76.3% favored professional attire with a

white coat followed by scrubs at 10.2%, business dress at 8.8%, and lastly casual dress at 4.7%. Also in this study, it was found that patients felt more comfortable sharing problems with a physician who was professionally dressed (2).

Wearing a tie as part of physicians' dress attire is always a possible option in studies, which are done to determine what dress is acceptable for physicians. There has been a lot of discussion recently about whether doctors should wear ties because of how infrequently they are washed. Because of this, there is a potential for ties to harbor bacteria. A 2011 study showed that 33% of patients specifically wanted to see their physician in a tie with a white coat or a tie with a dress shirt and dress slacks (3). A 2004 study of neckties worn by doctors at a New York hospital found that nearly half of them contained some sort of illness causing bacteria. That is opposed to only 10% of neck ties worn by security guards in the same hospital (4). That same study done in 2011, described earlier, showed that after the patients were re-surveyed with the additional data about the study done at the New York hospital; there was a 15% decrease, down to 18%, of the amount of patients who wanted their physician to wear a tie or a white coat with a tie (3).

A 1987 study found that patients had a more relaxed attitude about their physician's appearance than how other physicians viewed their own dress attire (5). Physicians held their appearance, or their dress attire, to higher standard and felt it meant more to their practice than did the patients.

There have been a few studies done to determine what dress attire for physicians is thought to be acceptable not only by patients, but as well as other physicians. The

purposes of this study is to gain an understanding of what patients see as acceptable dress attire for their general doctor, and if they were to alter their dress attire to something different, would their patients mind. Also, this study will compare acceptable dress attire, from the patient's perspective, of their general physician to their optometrist. It will also gain an understanding of acceptable dress attire for optometrists, and if their patients would mind if they were to change their dress style.

## Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was developed, which can be found in Appendix A, and distributed to patients presenting for general eye examinations. The testing population consisted of patients who are eighteen years of age or older and at the Michigan College of Optometry in Big Rapids, Michigan. Completion of the survey was voluntary and was presented during the patient's examination and collected after the completion of the examination.

The first part of the survey was a question asking what type of dress attire the respondent pictured a general physician would dress in? This was asked for both male and female doctors. The choices throughout the survey for male doctors were scrubs, slacks and a dress shirt with a tie, slacks and a dress shirt with no tie, suit, or other in which they could write down their own response. For women doctors, the choices for the survey were scrubs, professional attire, which can be defined as slacks and a blouse, suit, or other. The second question asked what dress attire does your family doctor wear?



Would you rather see your family doctor dress in other attire? Would you mind if your family doctor dressed in any of the above mentioned dress attire options for either males or females?

The third question was specific for clinic attire for optometrists. What dress attire does your optometrist wear? Would you rather see your optometrist in other attire? Would you mind if your optometrist dressed in any of the above mentioned dress attire options for either males or females?

The last three questions involved the use of a name tag and a white coat by a doctor. Would you prefer your doctor to wear a name tag? If yes, would you prefer it to have their picture on it with their name? Does your doctor wear a white coat? Would you prefer your doctor to wear a white coat? Finally, how important is your doctor's dress attire to you? The ranking system was as follows: 1 – not important, 2 – somewhat important, 3 – moderately important, 4 – very important, 5 – extremely important.

## Results

A total of 41 surveys were collected. The greatest number of survey respondents was in the 18-29 year old age group at 31.71%. 50-59 was the second highest at 24.39%. Males comprised of 29.27% of the patients surveyed, and 70.73% were women.

Survey results for the first question (When you think of a doctor, in general, what kind of dress attire do you picture?), are as follows. For men, 9.76% of people pictured male doctors in scrubs, 63.41% answered slacks dress shirt and a with a necktie, and

26.83% answered slacks and a dress shirt with no necktie. The option of a suit was never chosen. For women, 12.20% pictured women doctors in scrubs, 85.37% answered professional attire, and 2.43% answered a suit.

For the second question of the survey, when respondents were asked what their family doctor's dress attire was, 60.61% answered that their male family doctor wore slacks and a dress shirt with a necktie. 30.30% answered slacks dress and a shirt with no necktie, and 9.09% answered scrubs. 81.48% responded that their female family doctor wears professional attire, 11.11% wear scrubs, and 7.41% wear a suit. A follow up question was asked as to whether they would rather see their family doctor in other dress attire. 41.46% responded no, they would not rather see their family doctor in other attire and 58.54% of people responded that it did not matter to them. 2.44% of people wanted to see their family doctor change from wearing a tie to not wearing a tie. Lastly, it was asked if respondents would mind if their doctor wore any of the mentioned options of dress attire to work. 87.80% of people said no, they would not mind, and only 12.20% said yes they would.

The third question of the survey was specific regarding optometrists, but asked the same questions as the second question did for physicians. 85.00% answered that their male optometrist wore slacks and a dress shirt with a necktie, and 15.00% answered slacks and a dress shirt with no necktie. 92.00% of respondents answered that their female optometrist wore professional attire and 8.00% wore a suit. A follow up question was asked whether they would rather see their optometrist in other dress attire. 51.22% responded no, they would not rather see their optometrist in other dress attire and 39.02%

of people responded that it did not matter to them. 2.44% of people wanted to see their optometrist change from wearing a tie to not wearing a tie. Lastly, it was asked if respondents would mind if their optometrist wore any of the mentioned options of dress attire to work. 90.24% of people said no, they would not mind, and only 9.76% said yes they would.

53.66% of the respondents would prefer that their doctor wear a name tag. 7.32% would not prefer that their doctor wear a name tag, and 39.02% say it does not matter to them if their doctor wears a name tag. 63.64% of the people who would prefer that their doctor wear a name tag would prefer it be a picture ID along with their name. 9.09% responded that the name tag does not have to have a picture of the doctor on it and 27.27% said it did not matter if it did or did not have a picture of their doctor on it. 51.22% stated that their doctor did wear a white coat, 43.90% said that their doctor did not wear a white coat, and 4.88% were unaware if their doctor wore a white coat or not. 70.73% did not mind if their doctor wore a white coat or not. 12.20% preferred that their doctor wear a white coat and 17.07% did not want their doctor to wear a white coat.

Survey results of the final question, which asked patients to rank the importance of doctor dress attire, are as follows: 21.95% answered not important, 19.51% answered somewhat important, 36.58% answered moderately important, 17.07% answered very important, and finally 4.88% answered extremely important.

Dress codes for all optometry schools nationwide are very similar to one another. All schools require a white coat to be worn in clinic with some exceptions, such as while working with children in clinic. A name tag is to be worn, and generally the school's

name must be on the name tag. A male student must wear a dress shirt with a necktie and dress pants. A female student must wear a blouse or sweater and dress pants, or a professional skirt. Women are allowed to wear dresses. No information in any available lists indicates whether scrubs are acceptable in optometry school clinics.

## Discussion

This survey identified how important a doctor's dress attire is to his/her patients. From this survey's findings, doctors dress attire is not that important to most people. 78.05% of people responded that a doctors dress attire is of moderate, somewhat, or low importance to them. When asked, 97.56% of people said that they would not mind if their family doctor or their optometrist wore any of the dress attire options listed in the survey and that they would consider those as acceptable dress attire. A necktie is considered, by most patients, to be the more acceptable look for a male doctor and professional attire to be the more acceptable look for a female doctor. However, based on what was previously mentioned, patients would accept other options of dress attire as acceptable.

The survey also identified whether the general public prefers to have their doctor wear a name tag or wear a white coat. Regarding the wearing of a name tag, 53.66% answered yes that they would prefer their doctor wear a name tag. Thus, wearing a name tag is important to the majority of people; but on the other hand, 70.73% of people said that it does not matter to them if their doctor wears a white coat. That is a high percentage of people when just over half answered that their doctor wears a white coat.

The optometry schools throughout the United States all have similar dress codes for their students in clinic. The students of those schools begin their careers dressing as to what is outlined in the clinic handbook provided to them. The students then bring forth what is instilled in their minds as appropriate dress attire into their work environment and that may lead to what is come to be known as acceptable dress attire for doctors, or what is generally seen by patients. Further research needs to be done on this topic, such as surveying current doctors and asking them what type of dress attire they wear to work and why they choose that particular dress attire?

There has not been much research on what types of dress attire are acceptable for doctors, specifically optometrists. This survey assesses acceptable dress attire for doctors. This survey was excellent regarding the results it uncovered, but it does have some limitations. The survey was only distributed in Big Rapids, Michigan. Expanding the survey to other regions of the United States would help to diversify the results. Also, increasing the places that the survey was handed out, such as other modes of doctor's offices would also help in diversifying the results.

## Conclusion

Acceptable dress attire can mean different things to different doctors. All the options for doctors dress attire given in the survey are all professional and, according to patients, it does not matter to them what attire a doctor is wearing. Patients do not hold a doctor's appearance in high regard during their visit with the doctor. Based on the research it does not matter to most patients the type of attire a doctor chooses to wear or

if they have a white coat on, but patients do like to see a doctor with a name tag. More research is needed to be done to fully understand the patient perception and doctor perception on this topic.

#### REFERENCES:

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4. Smith, R. Nothing to sneeze at: Doctors' neckties seen as flu risk. *The Wall Street Journal.* November 20, 2009 A29.
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**APPENDIX A**  
**SURVEY**



Senior Project Survey – Michigan College of Optometry

Please indicate your gender: **M F**

Please indicate your age group: **18-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70+**

Please circle your answer for the following questions: (space after other is a write in option)

1. When you think of a doctor, in general, what type of dress attire do you picture?  
For men: **Scrubs Slacks, Dress Shirt with Tie Slacks, Dress Shirt NO Tie Suit**  
**Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
For Women: **Scrubs Professional Attire Suit Other** \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you have a family doctor? **Y / N**  
If yes, then:  
What does your family doctor wear when working?  
For men: **Scrubs Slacks, Dress Shirt with Tie Slacks, Dress Shirt NO Tie Suit**  
**Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
For Women: **Scrubs Professional Attire Suit Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
Would you rather see your doctor in other attire? **Y / N / Doesn't Matter**  
If yes, then:  
For men: **Scrubs Slacks, Dress Shirt with Tie Slacks, Dress Shirt NO Tie Suit**  
**Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
For Women: **Scrubs Professional Attire Suit Other** \_\_\_\_\_

Would you mind if your doctor wore any of the above mentioned options at work? **Y / N**

3. What does your Optometrist wear when working?  
For men: **Scrubs Slacks, Dress Shirt with Tie Slacks, Dress Shirt NO Tie Suit**  
**Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
For Women: **Scrubs Professional Attire Suit Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
Would you rather see your Optometrist in other attire? **Y / N / Doesn't Matter**  
If yes, then:  
For men: **Scrubs Slacks, Dress Shirt with Tie Slacks, Dress Shirt NO Tie Suit**  
**Other** \_\_\_\_\_  
For Women: **Scrubs Professional Attire Suit Other** \_\_\_\_\_

Would you mind if your Opometrist wore any of the above mentioned options at work? **Y / N**

4. Would you prefer your doctor wear a name tag? **Y / N / Doesn't Matter**  
If yes, would you prefer it be a picture ID with their name? **Y / N / Doesn't Matter**
5. Does your doctor wear a white coat? **Y / N / Don't Know**  
Would you prefer they wear a white coat? **Y / N / Doesn't Matter**

6. How important is your doctor's attire to you?
- |                  |                  |                   |                  |                  |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>Not</b>       | <b>Somewhat</b>  | <b>Moderately</b> | <b>Very</b>      | <b>Extremely</b> |
| <b>Important</b> | <b>Important</b> | <b>Important</b>  | <b>Important</b> | <b>Important</b> |
| <b>1</b>         | <b>2</b>         | <b>3</b>          | <b>4</b>         | <b>5</b>         |

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated!