



Doctors' dress code

To the Editor: I recently celebrated the golden anniversary of my graduation, and therefore belong to an older generation. Although retired, I do sessions at a local provincial hospital and am in touch with current work conditions. My enquiry relates to my concern about the dress code of some of our male doctors and about present-day dress regulations at medical schools.

It seems that the days of the white coat or the white safari top are largely over – and there may well be good reasons for that change. Sadly, however, one occasionally sees a doctor wearing clothes appropriate for doing a messy job in the garden, and one cannot distinguish between the doctor and a not-so-well-dressed patient. A few years ago, a patient refused 'to be treated by a porter' (the 'porter' being the doctor on duty).

Perhaps an exception can be made for doctors working in a busy casualty department; but even there, should not a certain amount of decorum be appropriate for a professional person? Change over the years is inevitable, but is there not a basic minimum dress code in academic and provincial hospitals?

What is the current dress code in teaching hospitals, and what are students and doctors expected to wear on ward rounds, etc.? I have long been out of touch with academic hospitals and cannot comment about private practice, which I left as a GP in 1970. Do we doctors not owe our patients the courtesy of appearing properly attired, so that they don't have to wonder whether they're talking to a doctor or porter or first-aider? And a stethoscope around the neck cannot be a substitute for clean and decent wear.

The ancient Greeks had a saying: 'The garment makes the man'. But maybe I am out of touch with present-day realities. Can anyone provide objective guidance?

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