

# Patient Preferences for Dental Clinical Attire: A Cross-Sectional Survey in a Dental Hospital

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**Abstract:** ***Aim:** To assess the patient opinion towards dental clinical attire, name badges and commonly used cross-infection control measures in the dental hospital. **Method:** Patients attending the dental hospital were asked to complete a questionnaire accompanied by photographs of models portraying a range of clinical attire. A representative sample of patients completed questionnaires over a 10 week period. **Results:** The study found that 42% of the patients felt clinical attire was very important and 94.1% preferred dental professionals to wear name badges. The majority of patients also preferred dentists to use both safety glasses (75.3%) and face masks (94.4%). **Conclusion:** Wearing professional dress of scrubs with apron while providing patient care by dentists may favorably influence trust and confidence-building in the dental patients.*

**Keywords:** Clinical attire, scrubs with apron, name badge

## 1. Introduction

The patient-Physician relationship is the foundation for all patient care. The importance of this can be traced back to Hippocrates, who stated that the physician “must be clean in person, well dressed, and anointed with sweet-smelling unguents.[1] Patient’s initial visit to the Physician plays a vital role in the development of a patient-Physician relationship as it is this time when the first impression about the physician is created.[2] If a doctor is well dressed, he conveys the image of a meticulous, knowledgeable and a compassionate individual, whereas unkempt appearance may portray disorganization and an uncaring attitude.[3,4] This will lead to an impact on the patient’s expectations of care as well as their opinion about the physician’s competence level.[5,6] It was also found that patients feel more comfortable to discuss medical issues with a well groomed and a confident care provider. Interestingly, review of the existing literature about physicians dress style revealed conflicting results. Few studies found that patients favored a more traditional dress style for the physicians whereas others preferred casual outfits for the physicians.[7] Also few studies claimed that the physician’s attire had no influence on the choice of their physicians.[8]

In the modern world of clinical dental practice, we are seeing paradigm shift from dentist patient relationship towards the consumer based service with increasing demands and pressures. A considerable amount of professional image of health care providers has been carried out, but there is a very little knowledge in this regard relating to the field of dentistry. Hence the aim of the present study was to assess the patient’s opinion towards dental clinical attire, name badges and commonly used cross-infection control measures in the dental hospital.

## 2. Materials and Methods

A cross sectional survey was conducted among the patients visiting SDM College of Dental Sciences and Hospital, a constituent unit of Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheswara University after they completed their treatment appointment. The survey was carried out for about 4 week period in 2018, and a total of 304 participants completed the questionnaire. A self-completion questionnaire was offered to all the

patients willing to participate in the study. Previous surveys were reviewed and the questionnaire was developed that addressed the concern of our study which included questions pertaining to the patients’ opinions on dental clinical attire, name badges and a number of cross infection control procedures. The questionnaire was then translated to the local language with the help of a translator and was checked for the clarity and ease of use. Informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to enrollment.

The questionnaire contained photographs of dentists with four different styles of dresses. In each of the photographs, the same background was used and the following characteristics remained constant: hairstyle, facial expression, presence of jewelry and physical appearance. The style of dress was the only variant across each of the photographs. Respondents were asked to indicate which numbered clinical attire they felt best portrayed what a dentist should wear. Using a checklist system, patients were asked to look at the numbered clinical attires and to indicate which they felt best portrayed the qualities of cleanliness, professionalism, authority, trustworthiness and approachability. Respondents were asked to rate how important they felt dental clinical attire was by using a modified Likert scale (1 = very important, 2 = important, 3 = quite important, 4 = unimportant). Completed patient questionnaires were collected and passed blind to an independent statistician where they were analyzed for response frequency and the results tabulated. Descriptive statistics and chi-squared analysis were performed on the data to assess responses to the questionnaire items across patient age groups and gender. Statistical significance was determined at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

## 3. Results

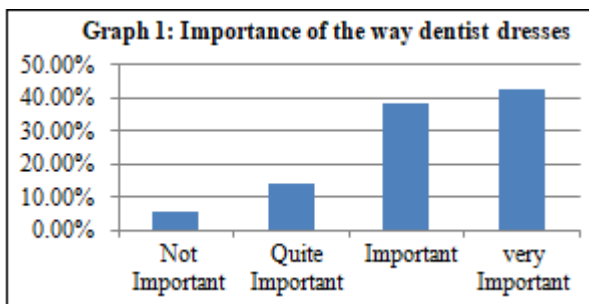
**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of the study population

Gender		Age Group			
Male	Female	18-30	31 -45	46 - 64	64+
159 (52.3%)	145 (47.7%)	157 (51.6%)	97 (31.9%)	42 (13.8%)	8 (2.6%)

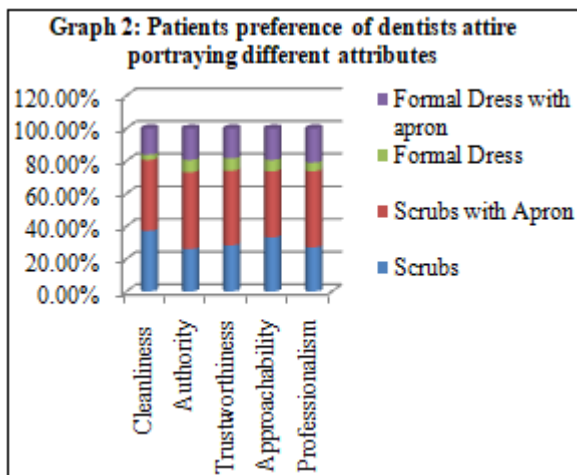
Out of the 304 respondents, 52.3% were males and 47.7% were females. The mean age of the participants was 28.5

years with majority of them belonging to age range of 18-30 years. When asked if they feel it is important for them the way the dentist dresses, majority of them felt it is either very important (42.40%) or important (38.20%), while only few (5.60%) of them felt it is not important.

Most of the patients (91.40%) were of the opinion that the dentists should wear name badges and this opinion was stronger among the participants belonging to younger age group (18-30 years). 75% of the patients felt that it is good for the dentists to wear safety goggles. 94.40% and 92.10% of the patients were of the view that the dentists should wear face mask and head cap respectively. There was no statistically significant difference in the opinion with respect to the importance of the way the dentist dresses and different cross infection control measures between the male and female patients.



Graph 1 demonstrates the patient’s preference of the dental clinical attire. Respondents overwhelmingly preferred scrubs with Apron (48.70%) attire followed by scrubs alone (34.90%), formal dress with Apron (14.80%) and least preferred dress being the formal Dress (1.60%).



Graph 2 shows the patients preference of dentist’s attire which portrays attributes like cleanliness, authority, trustworthiness, approachability and professionalism. Majority of the patients opined that Scrubs with Apron portrays more of cleanliness (43.40%), Authority (47%), Trustworthiness (45.70%), Approachability (40.50%) and Professionalism (46.70%). Whereas Scrubs only attire was the second preferred clinical attire portraying cleanliness (37.20%), Authority (26%), Trustworthiness (28.30%), Approachability (33.20%) and Professionalism (27%). But formal dress was the clinical attire which patients felt did not portray much of the cleanliness (3.30%), Authority (7.6%),

Trustworthiness (7.6%), Approachability (6.9%) and Professionalism (5.30%). There was a statistically significant difference in opinion about patient preference of dentist attire portraying different attributes across age groups. Compared to other age groups, patients of 18 -30 years age felt that the attire scrubs with apron portrayed more of trustworthiness, whereas patients between 31-45 years old were of the opinion that scrubs with apron portrayed more of cleanliness, approachability and professionalism.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the patient’s preferences of the dentist’s clinical attire among the patients visiting the SDM college of Dental Sciences and Hospital, Dharwad, Karnataka, India. As there are different dress styles adopted by the dentists in the recent past, we thought of assessing the patient preferences of dentist’s clinic attire. Among the 304 participants, there were equal numbers from each gender and more participants from the age group of 18-30 years.

In our study, majority of the respondents opined that it is important for them the way the dentists dress. Similar findings were observed by Mary E Brosk, [9] where the authors have concluded that nonverbal communication like dental care provider’s attire/ appearance play a major role in patient doctor relationship. Shakaib [10] in his study has reported that 82% of the subjects felt that physician’s appearance was important. In contrast, a study by Elliot [8] showed that the participants did not show any preference about the dentists clothing. Similar to the findings of a study by Matthew H. Kanzleret.,al,[3] our study also did not show association between gender and importance of dental attire, but a study by G. McKenna et.al[7] showed that female respondents placed much more emphasis on the importance of dental attire than males.

Majority of the participants indicated that they preferred their dentists to wear name badges which are in accordance with the studies by Elliot and Joycelyn.[8, 11] This opinion was especially stronger among the younger age group, which could be attributed to the fact that younger patients have always experienced dentistry with name badge use and also for ease of identification and communication. Majority of our participants were also of the impression that it is good that the dentists follow cross infection control measures like wearing safety goggles, face masks and head caps, in congruence with other studies.[7,11] This opinion could be formed lately among the patients because of the increased awareness about infection control through the increased access to internet and social media. But Elliot has mentioned that there was no preference about the use of protective glasses for examination in his study.[8]

When the photographs of dentists with different clinical attire were shown to the patients and asked to choose the best preferred attire for their dentists, most of them chose scrubs with apron. This finding is in contradiction to the studies which report that the patients preferred professional attire over surgical scrubs.[4,10,12,13] Few other studies have concluded that the traditional/ formal physician dress

was preferred attire by patients[6,8,9], whereas formal dress was the least preferred attire for the dentists in our study. Some studies[7,15] have concluded that patients preferred white coats for their dentists over other attires, whereas few studies showed semiformal dress as a preferred attire.[16]

When asked as to which clinical attire would best portray the different attributes, majority of the patients felt that scrubs with apron portray more of cleanliness, authority, trustworthiness, approachability and professionalism. Studies by McNaughton and Shakaib[10,17] have also shown that the respondent's trust and confidence was associated with preference for professional attire. Some more studies have shown that white coat reflects more authoritative image of physicians, which has a positive effect on patients. Also study by Mary E Brosky has shown that the patient's preference for the traditional white coat has been reduced.

## 5. Conclusions

Patients place a great deal of emphasis on how dental professionals dress. In our study scrubs with apron was considered as the best attire for the dentists. They are supportive of the appropriate use of protective equipment such as facemasks and safety glasses as well as name badges by their dentists

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