

FACULTY OF BIOLOGY, MEDICINE AND HEALTH

Communication and Dress Code for Students at The University of Manchester

All health and social care professionals are bound by the guidance and rules of conduct set out by the Department of Health and the relevant regulatory or representative body, e.g. the General Dental Council (GDC), General Medical Council (GMC), Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). These in turn define the standards for health and social care education in the UK in settings in which a student is interacting with patients, clients or service users.

The following document provides guidance on the standards of communication and dress code deemed appropriate for all health and social care students while in a learning environment, and have been informed by guidance provided by a number of Trusts in the North West for health and social care professionals. Students should be aware that during placements, they will need to seek out and comply with the standards as defined by the respective Trusts where they are based.

Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, including dress code, is an important element in ensuring that professional standards are maintained.

Communication

All health and social care students should adhere to the following principles (similarly defined within the General Medical Council's, 'Good Medical Practice' document) when communicating and in other skills training, discussion and assessment:

- listening to patients, clients and service users, taking account of their views, and responding honestly to their questions;
- giving patients the information they want or need to know in a way they can understand, ensuring that arrangements are made, wherever possible, to meet patients' language and communication needs;
- being considerate to those close to the patient and sensitive and responsive in giving them information and support;
- being readily accessible to patients and colleagues seeking information, advice or support when you are on duty.

Dress

It has been shown that non-verbal communication is at least as important as verbal communication, so how a student or health and social care professional appears to patients, clients, service users, relatives, professionals or colleagues may communicate as much as what is said. Extremes of dress compromise communication channels between health and social care students and other patients and professionals, regardless of either party's gender, or cultural or ethnic background.

Styles of dress or articles of clothing that introduce barriers to communication or that compromise, or could potentially compromise, hygiene must be avoided. Students should avoid displaying tattoos where possible as visible body art may not be permitted in Trusts during placements. Therefore, efforts should be made to cover them up. Where tattoos are located on the hand, wrist or forearm, careful consideration must be given to the maintenance of appropriate hand hygiene.

Styles of dress should inspire confidence and add to, not detract from, effective and sensitive communication. The wearing of items of cultural or religious significance will be permitted, providing that the health and safety and security of patients are not compromised. In general, students should be clean and smartly dressed. Thus the following are not permitted in settings in which a student is interacting with patients, clients or service users:

- T-shirts with slogans;
- Nail varnish or extensions;
- Extremes of hair styles;
- Body and face jewellery (except small stud earrings and wedding rings);
- Wrist bands/string;
- Revealing clothing;
- Open-toed sandals (all footwear should be low-heeled and well-fitting round the ankles);
- Trainers;
- Clothing that covers most of the face i.e. peaked caps and hoods
- The Niqab is also an example of unacceptable clothing when interacting with patients, clients or service users as it covers the face; however the Hijab (only obscuring the hair and the top of the head) is acceptable. This applies not only in clinical settings but also in educational elements of the programme where communication skills are relevant, such as some types of group work and role-play exercises. While the University reserves the right to check the identity of students who wear clothing that covers most of the face (as defined above) on key occasions such as examinations, it should be noted that this is done sensitively and by a member of the same gender;
- Strong odours, perfumes or aftershave.

For cross-infection reasons, NHS Trusts may not permit healthcare workers (including students) to wear wristwatches and ties other than bow ties.

The following are examples of good practice:

- Wearing approved clothing;
- Wearing identification badges or University/Trust identification passes;
- Tying back of hair if it interferes with, or adds risk, to a clinical interaction.

When on NHS premises such as a hospital Trust or a Primary Care Trust, a community setting such as a GP practice, or in the homes of patients, clients and service users, students should dress according to both the University's and appropriate local guidelines and regulations.