

Clinical Environment Dress Code Recommendations

This guidance has been created by the UCLMS Student-Staff Equality Diversity and Inclusion Faith sub-group

****Site Infection Prevention and Control policy overrides this guidance, and the dress code in clinical placements is at the discretion of Trusts****

The final judgement determining the dress code at each clinical site is the responsibility of that site based on patient safety considerations.

This document is designed to supplement existing guidance to facilitate UCL medical students to maintain patient safety whilst adhering to articles of faith and religious dress in clinical and educational settings. It draws on NHS guidance (April 2020) <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Uniforms-and-Workwear-Guidance-2-April-2020.pdf>

This guidance aims to support students to participate in all aspects of learning and highlights existing guidance and good practice.

Ensuring fair access to clinical learning opportunities is supported by the key principles in the BMA Charter for Medical Schools to Prevent and Address Racial Harassment¹.

We have compiled four key recommendations, from existing guidance, to provide further clarity on the rules surrounding dress code in the clinical environment. There are also additional resources which provide further guidance at the end of this document.

1. Fit testing and religious beards

FFP3 masks requiring a fit test may require a clean-shaven face to achieve good mask seal. However, some people are unable to shave due to religious reasons.

Below, we set out options to shaving for when this is not a feasible option, and we encourage colleagues to support students to reach an acceptable outcome:

- 1.1. Enquire whether the hospital can provide hood respirators or alternative forms of respiratory protective equipment;
- 1.2. Consider use of the *Singh Thattha* technique. This was pioneered in Manchester and was adopted and tested by several bearded British Sikh dentists who passed qualitative and quantitative fit tests, and provides a method to minimise the risk of face-mask leakage due to facial hair²;

East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust has produced specific guidance for managers on staff who wear a beard for religious or medical reasons⁴.

2. Religious head covering in theatres

According to Department of Health Uniforms and Workwear guidance:

- 2.1. NHS staff may wear their full cloth head coverings in surgical theatres – including hijabs, turbans and kippah;
- 2.2. There is no need to wear an overlying surgical cap;
- 2.3. Alternatively, a single use disposable head garment may be worn.

UCLH NHS Foundation Trust has included this in their Dress Code Uniform Policy³.

3. Bare below the elbows

The Muslim Council of Great Britain and NHS Muslim Chaplains have developed specific guidance to supplement the guidance published by the Department of Health⁴, to address some of the concerns raised by female Muslim healthcare workers and students^{5,6}:

- 3.1. Alternatives to bare below the elbows are 3/4 length sleeves (which must not be loose or dangling and must be able to be rolled or pulled back and kept securely in place during handwashing or direct patient care activity) or disposable oversleeves;
- 3.2. Full-length sleeves are permissible if not involved in direct patient care (Direct patient care has been redefined to the patient bedspace or any activity that involves patient contact);
- 3.3. Disposable oversleeves, elasticated at the elbow and wrist, may be used but must be put on and discarded in the same way as disposable gloves.

4. Sikh Kara

5. The Kara is a sacred bracelet made of steel, worn by male and female Sikhs. It is a religious requirement to wear the Kara and Sikhs are not permitted to remove it⁷. The follow recommendations have been compiled from the Department of Health 2010 guidance⁴, taking into account the Equality and Human Rights Commission Guidance on the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in the workplace and public spaces⁷:



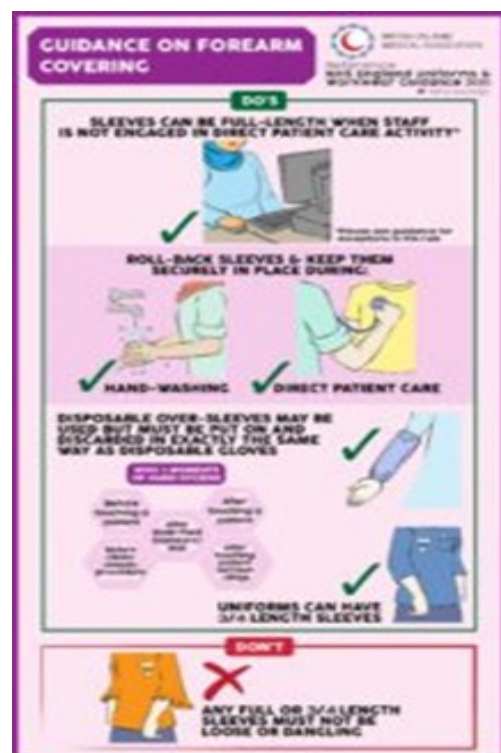
4.1. Wearing a bracelet for religious reasons, e.g. the Sikh Kara, may be permitted, but it must be pushed up the arm above the elbow and secured in place for hand washing and direct patient care activity;

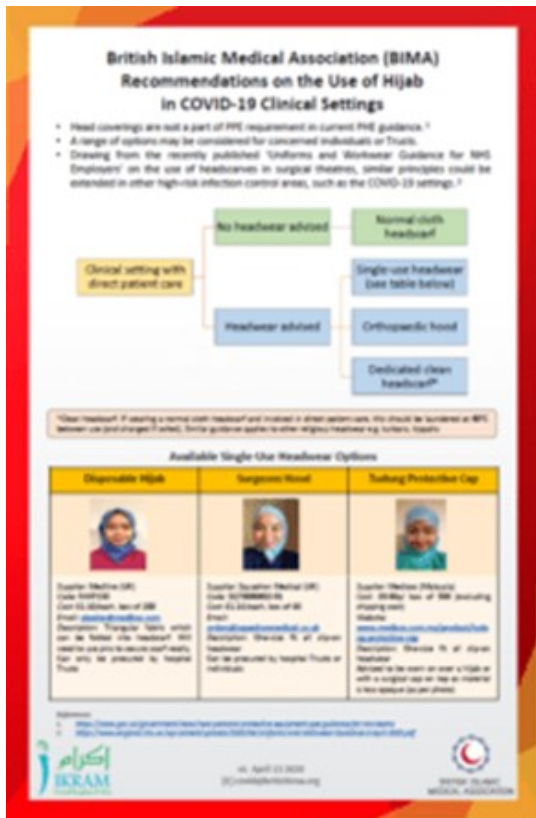
4.2. Some Trusts may allow students to tape up their Kara when in surgical theatre;

We suggest considering allowing the Kara to be worn when not in direct patient facing activity, and to consider the use of disposable sleeve covers when engaging in direct patient-facing activity, if securing above the elbows is not possible.

5. Additional Resources

1. The following infographics are produced by the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) around BBE and headscarves and provide good summaries of the guidance to be shared with students.
<https://www.britishima.org/nhs-uniform-guidance/>





2. A description of the Singh Thattha technique for under-mask beard cover:
[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7532752/;](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7532752/)
3. The following resources are examples of good practice being implemented by various hospitals with regards to religious dress code:
 - a. Barts Health NHS Trust:
 - Disposable hijabs for Muslim women requiring head coverings;
 - Reusable face masks for women with thin faces who have failed fit tests for all disposable masks;
 - Powered hoods for people who fail the half-mask fit tests, along with men who wish to keep their beards for religious reasons.

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/workforce/addressing-impact-of-covid-19-on-bame-staff-in-the-nhs/safe-working-for-all-nhs-staff/barts-health-nhs-trust/>

- b. Worcestershire trust's dress code policy – see page 13, which provides more detail about the practical implementation of policy changes facilitating equality: [WAHT-HR-078 v2.2 \(1\).pdf](#)
- c. UCLH updated dress code policy: [UCLH-Dress-Code-Uniform-Policy.pdf](#)
- d. [Guidance for managers on staff who wear a beard for religious or medical reasons. East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust](#)
4. St. George's University of London (SGUL) has developed a Religion and Belief code of Practice, which contains some useful guidance on dress codes:

<https://www.sgul.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/documents/religion-belief-code-of-practice.pdf>
5. Uniforms and workwear: guidance for NHS employers, 2020; Appendix B - Advice from Muslim Spiritual Care Provision (MSCP) in the NHS
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Uniforms-and-Workwear-Guidance-2-April-2020.pdf>

References:

1. *A charter for medical schools to prevent and address racial harassment*. 2020, British Medical Association. p. 9. Available at: <https://www.bma.org.uk/media/2030/bma-med-school-charter-implementation.pdf>
2. Singh R, Safri HS, Singh S, Ubhi BS, Singh G, Alg GS, et al. *Under-mask beard cover (Singh Thattha technique) for donning respirator masks in COVID-19 patient care*. J Hosp Infect. 2020;106(4):782-5. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7532752/>
3. *Dress code and Uniform*. University College London Hospitals; 2018 12/07/2018. Available at: <https://www.britishima.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/UCLH-Dress-Code-Uniform-Policy.pdf>
4. *Uniforms and Workwear guidance*. NHS England and NHS Improvement; April 2020 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Uniforms-and-Workwear-Guidance-2-April-2020.pdf>
5. Malik, A., et al., '*I decided not to go into surgery due to dress code*': a cross-sectional study within the UK investigating experiences of female Muslim medical health professionals on bare below the elbows (BBE) policy and wearing headscarves (hijabs) in theatre. BMJ Open, 2019. **9**(3): p.
6. *Supplement to Uniforms and Workwear: An evidence base for developing local policy: Statement on behalf of the Muslim Spiritual Care Provision*; 2007. Available at: <http://archive.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MSCP-Dress-Code-Recommendations.pdf> E019954. Available at: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/3/e019954>
7. *Guidance on the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in the workplace and public spaces* https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1986/1/sikh_articles_of_faith_guidance_final.pdf
8. Badat S, Blaaza M, Badat Z, Butt R. *Sacrifices in the face of the pandemic: Fit testing and facial hair for Muslim healthcare professionals*. Journal of the British Islamic Medical Association. 2020;6(2). Available at: https://jbima.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/4_Advocacy_3_-poster_Sacrifices-in-the-face-of-the-pandemic-Fit-testing_-Badat-Z.pdf
9. *Uniform, Standards of Dress and Personal Appearance Policy*. North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust; July 2021. Available at: <https://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Uniform-Standards-of-Dress-Personal-Appearance-Policy-V2.1-FINAL.pdf>