

Healthcare Professional Appearance Policy – FAQ

The Professional Appearance Policy (#HC-HR-101-RR) outlines dress and grooming guidelines intended to promote a consistent professional image throughout OHSU Healthcare. These frequently asked questions (FAQ) were developed by Healthcare Human Resources to address concerns raised during the introduction of the revised Professional Appearance Policy. This policy will go to effect on May 1, 2014.

The policy can be found on the [O2 Policy Manager](#); we encourage you to review it. If you have questions that are not addressed, please speak to your supervisor. For guidance about policy interpretation and decision-making, supervisors should contact OHSU Healthcare Human Resources, (503) 346-0781.

General

Q: Why do we need a Professional Appearance Policy at OHSU? Why are we introducing this now?

A: The professional appearance of OHSU workforce members helps patients and visitors feel comfortable and confident in the care they receive. A high level of professionalism directly impacts the confidence patients have in our abilities, and also enhances OHSU's reputation as a leader in the community.

The policy is not new; OHSU Healthcare has had various Professional Appearance policies since 1998. The newest revision will go into effect on May 1, 2014, and will be reviewed again in 2017.

Q: Who does this policy apply to?

A: OHSU has four missions: Healthcare, Academic, Research and Central Services missions. Healthcare covers about 7,000 of OHSU's 14,000 employees.

This policy applies to all OHSU Healthcare workforce members, as well as faculty, researchers, represented and unclassified administrative, registered and visiting students, volunteers, board members, visiting healthcare practitioners, temporary workforce members, vendors doing business with OHSU Healthcare and others working for or on behalf of OHSU Healthcare.

Q: When does this policy apply? Does it apply only while I am on the clock?

A: You are correct about the policy applying while you are on the clock. The policy states: "Workforce members may arrive on or leave campus wearing transitional clothing, e.g. biking, walking or less formal attire. During their shifts or scheduled work hours, workforce members must follow the professional appearance expectations relevant to their work areas."

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Q: Who reviewed and revised this policy?

A: Over 400 people, from all levels of the organization (individual contributors and management representatives) through 18 stakeholder groups throughout the University have reviewed and approved it. This is one the only policies at OHSU that has been reviewed this widely. Specifically, these were the groups that reviewed and supported the policy.

- Professional Appearance Policy Review Committee
- Human Resources Advisory Committee
- Professional Practice Leaders
- Risk Management
- Legal Department
- Affirmative Action Equal Opportunity
- HR Directors
- Healthcare Cultural Advocacy Team
- Healthcare Human Resources Department
- Nursing Practice Council
- Department Administrators/Faculty Practice Plan Forum
- Hospital Financial Services Management Team
- AFSCME
- AURN/Management Collaborative
- Professional Board
- Clinical Chairs
- Healthcare Policy Steering Committee
- OHSU Healthcare Administrative Team

This policy is among the most progressive healthcare professional appearance policies in the country and much more liberal than any of our competitors regionally or in other West Coast academic medical centers have.

Q: I am a Healthcare employee and a telecommuter that works for OHSU remotely. Do I need to follow the policy at home?

A: While an employee is doing work at home, they are free to wear clothing of their choice. However, telecommuters should keep in mind that they must abide by the professional appearance policy whenever they are interacting visually, such as a meeting via webcam, or coming to an OHSU building as an employee.

Q: I work for Basic Sciences in the Research mission. Does this policy apply to me?

A: Basic Sciences will not be governed by this policy. Any researcher who works directly with our patients will have to follow the policy while in these patient encounters.

Q: If I work for a non-Healthcare mission and am attending a meeting in a Healthcare building, does this policy apply to me?

A: If you work for a different mission, then the policy applies to you when you are present in the OHSU patient care areas. This is defined as: "Any area where patients are present for clinical reasons. This includes the entrance to any unit or clinic, nursing stations, patient rooms, treatment rooms, corridors used by patients, and reception or waiting areas." If your meeting will be held in a Healthcare building, but not within a clinic, you will not be required to follow the policy in that context. For example, the CHH Conference Center (3rd floor) is not considered a clinical area.

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Q: Does the Healthcare professional appearance policy apply to students or other non-Healthcare employees who do not provide direct patient care, treatment or services, but who pass through the hospital from the tram in walking or biking clothing?

A: No, the new professional appearance policy does not apply to them. We consider this pass-through as transitional and as long as they are coming or going, they are not subject to the policy. If they choose to spend more than transitional time in any of the patient care areas, they must adhere to the revised policy.

Please note that this exception for transition also applies to Healthcare employees in transition to their work areas to and from home.

Q: How do the vendors learn about this policy?

A: OHSU contracts state that vendor will have to comply with applicable OHSU policies. Contracts & Purchasing Department does a great job in communicating to our vendors through their website about various OHSU policies. The Contracts and Purchasing Department will revisit this topic and see how we can ensure success with the launch. Departments also have a role in notifying their vendors and visiting practitioners of the specific policies they need to adhere by.

Q: I am an employee with a disability. Does this policy apply to me?

A: OHSU recognizes its diversity and has great services in place that ensure that individuals with disabilities have tools available for making their workplace comfortable for them. If you need any reasonable accommodations (any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable employee with a disability to perform essential job functions) related to the revised Professional Appearance Policy, speak with your supervisor about needed accommodations or contact Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity Department (503 494-5148). They are happy to help.

Q: My union affiliation is an important part of my professional identity at OHSU. How can I appropriately display insignia?

A: You can display professional insignia, including unions and professional associations, any way you like as long as it does not have messages that reflect negatively upon OHSU. This includes discrete identifiers such as pins, buttons, or stickers on your badge holder or clothing. Please ensure that your insignia does not cover your identity on your OHSU badge.

Dresses and skirts

Q: Can I wear denim skirts?

A: We removed denim skirts from the acceptable list for sake of gender equity. If men cannot wear jeans nor should women be able to wear denim skirts. We consider denim material to be too casual for a professional workplace.

Q: Can anyone wear skirts or dresses?

A: We celebrate diversity at OHSU. If wearing a dress is in alignment with your gender identity and expression, we welcome you to wear it. We also welcome you to wear a professional kilt.

Hats and head coverings

Q: Can I wear a surgical cap with a logo from my Alma Mater or from my previous employer?

A: No. We prefer OHSU brand loyalty among our employees. We want our patients to remember that they were cared for by OHSU employees in addition to having great clinical outcomes and a positive patient experience.

Q: I like to wear a surgical cap with cartoon characters to make my pediatric patients smile. Is that ok?

A: Absolutely. We do not consider cartoon characters of being commercial logos.

Headphones and ear buds

Q: Am I able to wear headphones at my desk? Under the new policy, is this acceptable? What about when I take a break in a public area?

A: It depends. Is your desk in a location where patients or other visitors may ask you for assistance? If so, you should not wear headphones. If you sit in a private area where visitors are unlikely to walk by, your supervisor is able to determine if it is acceptable for headphones to be worn.

During breaks, we discourage employees from wearing ear buds or headphones if they are in an area where a visitor may see them. Employees are welcome to use headphones in employee lounges, break rooms, or public dining areas.

Hosiery

Q: Can I wear hosiery that looks like fishnet stockings but has patterns?

A: Fishnet is hosiery with an open, diamond shaped knit. Fencenet, sometimes referred to as whalenets, is similar to fishnet, but with a much wider pattern. Fishnet is considered to be too sexy of a form of hosiery in the OHSU workplace.

Sheers (10-20 denier), opaque (40+ denier) and pattern pantyhose are considered acceptable. If you wonder if your hosiery is too risqué, it probably is.

Q: An OHSU employee is wearing a skirt five inches above her knees. She insists that the short skirt is okay since she is wearing leggings under it. Is the employee compliant?

A: This employee is non-compliant with the revised professional appearance policy. Under the new policy leggings may not be worn as pants. Skirt and dress hemlines must be no higher than two inches above the knee when standing, regardless of hosiery.

Jackets

Q: Why can I not wear fleece in the clinical areas?

A: Fleece is considered unacceptable only in clinical and patient care areas for infection control reasons. Cotton fleece material collects and sheds lint. Lint may harbor microbial-laden dust, skin squames, and respiratory droplets. In addition, fleece is made up of a napped surface with low density, which renders it more flammable.

Q: My jacket is made by a company that is a major sponsor of OHSU. Can I wear it at work?

A: Concerns have been raised regarding wearing the brands of OHSU sponsors. This is an issue that we will continue to review, and may be a scenario in which department managers decide to create an addendum to the policy. At this time, you should refrain from wearing any jacket that prominently displays non-OHSU branding.

Q: Where can I buy a jacket with an OHSU logo?

A: OHSU branded apparel can be found at the [OHSU Store](#) located at the Student Center and online. OHSU offers students, faculty, and departments promotional logo merchandise and apparel at a discounted price. A portion of the proceeds supports student activities at OHSU. Employees are *not* required to wear OHSU branded apparel; however they are welcome to do so if they choose.

Pants

Q: Can I wear leggings?

A: Leggings are not forbidden, so feel free to wear them. You just cannot wear them without covering your body from your waist to your lower thigh. Hence, leggings cannot be used in lieu of pants or an otherwise unacceptable piece of garment.

Q: Is the following fabric allowed?

A: Corduroy is allowed. Corduroy is a textile composed of twisted fibers that, when woven, lie parallel to one another to form the cloth's distinct pattern, a "cord." Corduroy is, in essence, a ridged form of velvet. Corduroy is found in the construction of trousers, jackets and shirts.

A: Chambray is allowed. It is a light to mid-weight, plain-weave fabric whose warp and weft threads are different colors, one of these generally white. Chambray is also called cambric or batiste. Generally, chambray is made out of cotton, but it can also be linen and, increasingly, incorporate synthetic fibers.

A: Khaki is allowed. Khaki is a color, a light shade of yellow-brown similar to tan or beige. Khaki also comes in dark yellowish-green color, called olive drab. The term can refer to the fabric and style of trousers, also called "chinos", rather than their color. Chino cloth is a twill fabric, originally made of 100% cotton. Today it is also found in cotton-synthetic blends.

A: Denim is not allowed. Denim is a sturdy cotton twill textile. Denim fabric dyeing is divided into two categories: indigo dyeing and sulfur dyeing. Indigo dyeing produces the traditional blue color or shades similar to it. Sulfur dyeing produces specialty black colors and other colors, such as red, pink, purple, gray, rust, mustard, and green. None of those colors are allowed.

Q: What is happening to casual Fridays?

A: Casual Fridays with jeans will not be acceptable in any area that this policy governs. This will bring us more equity. Most OHSU employees have never experienced a casual Friday at OHSU.

Shoes

Q: I work in an administrative office. Can I wear peep toe or high heel shoes?

A: Yes. Only sandals, slippers, flip-flops, and toe shoes are forbidden.

Q: Can I wear athletic shoes?

A: We realize that many OHSU employees walk great distances throughout their workday. For employees in direct patient care, athletic shoes continue to be acceptable footwear. If you are in an office setting, check with your supervisor to determine if athletic shoes are an appropriate footwear choice for your environment.

There are commercial business dress shoe brands that are designed for walking that may be helpful.

Scrubs

Several questions regarding scrubs, addressed below, were received. More detailed information around the Surgical Scrub Suit policy will be forthcoming soon. The policy will go into effect on June 1, 2014.

Q: Can I wear blue OHSU surgical scrubs outside OHSU campus?

A: No. An upcoming revised Surgical Scrub Suit policy will forbid wearing OHSU-owned scrubs outside OHSU. We have received a lot of negative attention about this, including in *Willamette Week*, February 19, 2014. ["Dr. Know: The Hubbub on Scrubs: Should hospital workers really be wearing their scrubs everywhere?"](#) "I live in South Waterfront, near OHSU, and I see people wearing scrubs everywhere. If scrubs are worn to maintain cleanliness in the hospital, doesn't wearing them out to Little Big Burger defeat the purpose?"

Q: Several OHSU employees wear scrub pants with a t-shirt and athletic jacket. This is the most comfortable outfit for them, as scrub tops can be itchy and the temperature fluctuates throughout their workday. How will this new policy affect these employees?

A: It is not acceptable for OHSU employees to wear a T-shirt in place of scrub top. Athletic jackets are not considered professional enough for the workplace. If an employee is concerned about the temperature of their work area, the Professional Appearance Policy allows for many options to remedy this while also presenting a consistent professional image at OHSU.

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Q: Can I wear long sleeves under my OHSU-owned scrubs?

A: No. All personal clothing must be completely covered by the surgical attire. Undergarments will be contained underneath the scrub top and bottom; personal clothing that extends above the scrub top neckline or below the sleeve or pant leg of the surgical attire may not be worn. There are all sizes of the purple warm-up jackets that can be only worn inside the OR environment.

Q: Can I wear long sleeves under my personally owned scrubs?

A: Yes. You may wear a clean, solid color long sleeved shirt underneath your scrub top.

Q: When is the Surgical Scrub Policy launched and how can I access the policy?

A: The Surgical Scrub Suit Policy launch will happen in early May through eSTAT. You will be able access the policy then, and it will be going into effect on June 1.

Q: Can you explain the restrictions related to personally-owned scrubs? I own several personal scrub tops with ruffles, eyelets, and front-tie belts. I have worn these for years with no issues.

A: The goal of the section “Scrubs with scalloped or ruffled edges, any type of holes such as eyelets, or other embellishments, belts or ties at the front or on the sides are unacceptable” is to protect our employees and patients. *American Journal of Infection Control*, the official publication of APIC - the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology reported in 2011 that 60% of hospital staff’s uniforms were colonized with potentially pathogenic bacteria, including drug-resistant organisms, including methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Additional uneven surface (scalloped or ruffled edges, eyelets) can harbor bacteria and side belts may touch the patient while they receive care. We also want to protect you from getting hurt by tangling belts that get caught into equipment or get grabbed by an aggressive patient. In order to maintain a clean and safe atmosphere at OHSU, the employee should no longer wear these scrub tops at work.

Tops

Q: Can I wear shirts that have logos or embroidery?

A: It is quite common for organizations to limit the visibility of other brands. However, if your shirt or sweater is otherwise appropriate, you can have small embroidery on it, such as the small logo embroidered on Ralph Lauren Polo shirts. We are mainly trying to limit large silkscreen logos and printing (example "Budweiser" t-shirts).

Q: What’s the difference between a short-sleeved top and a t-shirt?

A: Short sleeved tops, including but not limited to those with a crew neck, v-neck, or collar, are acceptable, but they must be the appropriate fit, not expose excessive skin, may not display non-OHSU logos (with the exception mentioned above), and must be in good condition. They should not be boxy. If you received the shirt at your most recent fun-run or as a free gift for opening your checking account, it’s probably not work-appropriate.

Q: How do you define appropriate amount of cleavage?

A: We have not defined any inch based measure for this, but in this Healthcare workplace, we don’t want to see male chest hair nor female cleavage. The standard rule in many other industries is that a shirt should fall one to two inches above the cleavage.

Body art and tattoos

Q: My department used to forbid all tattoos. Do I still need to cover mine?

A: If your department does not have an addendum that outlines an exception for tattoo covering, you do not need to cover your tattoos that are appropriate in content. You still have to cover tattoos with messages that are racist or xenophobic (n-word, swastika), violent (weapons, blood, dead bodies), sexist (pin up girls), and/or images inappropriate to a hospital (Grim Reaper, naked bodies).

Body odor

Q: Are all scented products forbidden?

A: At this point we are restricting mainly strong fragrances such as perfumes and aftershaves. You can still use lightly scented soaps and body products. We are trying to avoid patient feedback like this:

“The employee where I checked in was wearing a very powerful aftershave/cologne which sent me into an asthma attack.”

Identification Badges

Q: Why can we not wear lanyards anymore?

A: We are requesting the removal of lanyards for two reasons: We believe that it impacts the patient experience and lowers infection risk. First, because of their length, lanyards place your ID badge at the level of your abdomen, which makes it difficult to see during an average interaction. Also, lanyards allow the badge to easily turn backwards, which makes it impossible to read. The main goal here is to increase the ease for any given patient, visitor or peer to see your badge and read your name from it easily.

Lanyards also get contaminated by bacteria and our workforce rarely washes or otherwise sanitizes their lanyards. According to Kotsanas, Scott, Gillespie, Korman, & Stuart (2008), lanyards were found to be contaminated with 10 times the median bacterial load per area sampled compared with identity badges, including bacteria such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, methicillin-sensitive *S. aureus* (MSSA), *Enterococcus* spp and aerobic gram-negative bacilli.

Q: I also work for VA Hospital. What should I do with my VA badge?

A: You can wear your other badges and keys on a lanyard if you want. However, if you work with OHSU patients, we would prefer you exposing your OHSU badge above the heart level.

Q: I have 8 red roses on my badge. Do I have to remove them?

A: The red rose restriction has been in place since 2008. The goal is that these recognition emblems do not hinder identity visibility. We appreciate your commitment to excellent service, and we know that your customers will appreciate being able to read your name easily.

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Q: Can students, who do not provide direct patient care, treatment or services, still wear their ID badges on lanyards?

A: Yes. The professional appearance policy does not apply to them. However, there may be a change coming for OHSU members in all missions regarding lanyards. This change has not yet happened.

Q: When I place my ID badge “above my heart”, it rests on my breast. It bothers me that when someone reads my name and department, they are looking at my breast. What can I do?

A: There are alternative badge clips available through Parking and Transportation that keep your badge higher, closer to your collar bone. This simple plastic clip is available for free. Later on, there will be also magnetic clips available at the OHSU Gift Store for a nominal fee that secures the badge next to your collar bone.

Q: When I place my ICARE badge clip it stretches my collar. What can I do?

A: You can clip it higher towards your shoulder, get an alternative, lighter clip from Parking and Transportation or remove some of the badge attachments that you may have to lighten it.

Q: Where can I get an ICARE clip?

A: Your manager can request those from the Patient Experience department.

Q: My shirts do not have a collar. What can I do?

A: We are working with OHSU Gift Store at the OHSU Hospital 9th floor to get name badge holders that are magnetic and easy to clip to clothing without a collar. Those will be available before May 1.

Jewelry

Q: What does the new Professional Appearance Policy say about facial piercings?

A: The new Professional Appearance Policy states that OHSU employees can have one facial piercing. Facial piercing should consist of studded jewelry, no rings or hoops.