

An Evidence Based Approach to Creating a New Nursing Dress Code

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Problem:

The issue of revising the dress code for nurses was submitted to the Nursing Practice Council. There was concern that patients could not identify the registered nurse (RN) in the hospital. Additionally, physical appearance can impact the perception of professionalism and has the potential to influence the therapeutic relationship.

Evidence:

A review of the literature yielded many opinion articles but little evidence to support a particular dress code.

Strategy:

The nurses designed and conducted a prospective descriptive study using survey methodology. Institutional Review Board approval was granted. The research questions were:

1. How well can patients identify the RN?
2. How would patients prefer to identify the RN?
3. What manner of dress for nurses do patients prefer?
4. What are the patients' perceptions of the professionalism of the nurses?

A randomized sample of 431 adult inpatients on general medical-surgical units was obtained.

Practice Change:

The results of the study and evidence from infectious disease literature were used to develop a new dress code for nurses.

Evaluation:

Survey results demonstrated that 55% of the patients found it difficult to identify the RN. Most patients (64%) thought nurses should be able to wear any color uniform, preferred nurses' hair to be off the shoulders (73%), no long fingernails (91%), and no excessive jewelry (82%). The most preferred way to identify the RN was by a large print "RN" name badge (80%).

Results

The new dress code is in policy. Compliance is in progress and is expected to improve with the knowledge that the changes are evidence based.

Recommendations:

Compliance will be assessed and after a year of implementation the study will be repeated to determine if the changes have improved the patients' ability to identify the RN and if the professional image of our nurses remains high.

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