

Professional Business Attire (Dress Code) FAQ from Employees

When Human Resources proposed a revised dress code policy it was opened to feedback from all UNC Health Care employees. HR, the Policy Advisory Committee, and the Vice Presidents have taken another look at the dress code policy titled “Professional Business Attire” and made a few more changes to try and incorporate some of the concerns from our employees. Below is a list of questions asked about the proposed dress code.

I. First, the most popular: Should we allow denim?

HR received many e-mails about whether it is true that we will allow denim, except for “blue jeans” such as:

- Some employees do not like the idea of allowing denim to be worn in the work place.
- Some want to know if red, green, pink, or black jeans will be allowed since only “blue jeans” are specified.
- A few asked if employees will be allowed to wear denim skirts and shirts.
- A few asked if employees will be allowed to wear blue denim skirts and dresses, since they are not pants.

The policy will be revised to read as follows: *No denim unless as an approved uniform component.*

II. I feel that many of the staff is being punished due to how some people dress. Also, I can say that most of the doctors will not follow this dress code. In the winter, when it is cold and snowing, I feel that the most important thing is for us to come to work and not how we dress. Some of us have to walk from the Craig deck to work and when it is cold and snowy we have to wear dress slacks. You have a shortage of hospital employees now especially nurses, so you need to carefully think of this. I wear blue jeans and a nice top than I come and change into scrubs and I look nice. Also what about the staff who cannot afford this?

This dress code proposal is too restrictive. Those of us who work in scrubs wear our street clothes in to work, and again when we leave the hospital. I understand the need for a measure of modesty in our apparel, but specifying the color of the jeans we wear is not treating us as professionals.

Some employees enjoy a run in the morning with co-workers prior to reporting for work. Several employees also bike to work. How will the dress code impact on them wearing their running/biking attire? The employees’ change into scrubs prior to work of course.

We have changed the way the scrubs section was worded so that employees will not feel like they are being punished. If you wear a uniform or hospital scrubs, it is okay for you to wear jeans or sweat pants coming into and leaving the building. This is okay so long as you change into a uniform or hospital scrubs before clocking in and clock out before changing out of the uniform or hospital scrubs. This is because you are not officially working for UNC Health Care until after you clock in. We cannot enforce our dress policies on the general public and visitors, and only on our employees when they are working.

III. Will this policy apply to all residents, temps and contract employees as well?

Yes, the policy applies to everyone: *all employees, contract employees, residents, volunteers, students, Medical Staff of UNC Hospitals, School of Medicine, and research personnel utilizing UNC Health Care facilities.*

IV. When are UNC employees to start adhering to this new policy?

The effective date will be widely announced through *Connections, HR Essentials, News for Employees* and *News for Managers*. We will also have an Instructional Bulletin that will inform employees of the effective

date and compare the old policy side-by-side with the new policy. The effective date will be placed on the left side of the policy so that any employee looking at the policy will know when it applies.

- V. “An employee's name and picture must be visible at eye level at all times.” Eye levels vary from person to person. Eye levels for tall employees are different than eye levels for short employees. This needs to be clearly defined. Also, is this policy stating employees can no longer wear the “over the neck” photo ID badge holders any more?**

The policy was revised because several people were having similar difficulties with the wording of the ID badge and where it must be worn. The reworded policy is not as restrictive, so long as the name and photo are clearly viewable. It does not matter if it is near the shoulder or the waist.

- VI. Many people, like myself, often have to bend, lift, etc. It would seem that allowing "culottes", "gaucho pants" or similar attire would make it possible to perform these sorts of activities with ease while still maintaining a professional appearance. Would they be considered?**

The committee did discuss many different styles of clothing, but did not want to go into that much detail. If that level of detail for pants was a dictate to what type or brand of pants will or will not be allowed, then enforceability becomes difficult.

- VII. I believe the shorts (or similar attire) is referring to skorts - but I think it should be spelled out.**

This has been spelled out as suggested.

- VIII. What are uniform short pants and who wears them?**

Good question – that section was reworded to: *Shorts or skorts (or similar attire) unless a part of an approved uniform.* An example is the staff at Meadowmont Wellness Center may wear shorts in the course of their work.

- IX. Prohibited: “Logos, unless they identify UNC Health Care or units within UNC Health Care.” We currently have employees who wear shirts that have logos of a personal nature (church related, school related). Does this mean no personal logos at all other than UNC Health Care or its units?**

Yes, we do not want to give the impression that UNC Health Care agrees with or actively supports other companies, schools, or churches. This is also the current policy with regards to collarless shirts, so those employees may not be adhering to the current policy.

- X. I think it would greatly improve our staff's appearance to allow only UNC Health Care or unit t-shirts and encourage this by not approving any other type.**

Public Affairs and Marketing is the only office that can approve a logo and its uses.

- XI. Many people, particularly Indian and Muslim women, choose to wear loose clothing such as saris or burkhas. I feel the “excessively loose” category may offend these individuals and is insensitive to their culture. Perhaps it can be re-phrased such that it refers to anyone working in areas where these items could be hazardous or something along those lines? Or that visible underwear (as is the case with some men and women who wear their pants loose & hung low) is a no-no?**

We removed the “excessively loose” phrase to make sure we do not offend any of our employees.

XII. The 2" hem business seems unnecessary and pretty unenforceable. Will we use rulers? I have seen VPs, Directors and Managers all with skirts that clearly were more than 2" above the knee.

We have changed it so skirts above the knee are not allowed.

XIII. If uniforms are required at the departmental level, who pays for the uniforms? The department or the individual employees?

In the case of department uniforms, the first is provided to the employee by the department and after that the employee may be required to purchase additional uniforms.

XIV. Shoes should be clean, in good repair, and coordinated with dress attire. Who decides whether your shoes are coordinated?

We have changed that section so it reads: *Shoes should be clean and in good repair.*

XV. In my opinion it should be up to the employee on what type of heel and how high of a heel is safe for them to wear to work. I mean the only employees that wear heels to work are office support. Depending on the department they work in, they already know what kind of shoes they can wear to work and are comfortable and safe in. Why does the policy stipulate a heel height?

We did remove the reference to a specific height. We must make sure our employees are aware of the regulations that govern the safety and importance of shoes. For legal reasons, we have to determine if some areas are appropriate for all types of shoes and for all other areas we need to give guidelines about what should not be worn.

XVI. While I personally do not wear shoes with > 2.5" heels, there are many appropriate shoe styles with 2.75 or 3 inch heels. Supervisors will be hard-pressed to enforce this rule!

The height requirement has been removed and changed to: *Excessively high-heeled shoes*, so it is now up to the supervisor to decide what is excessively high and to communicate that to the employees.

XVII. If non-patient care areas may wear open-toe shoes, I think its better to leave it at that vs. saying they're allowed by staff, but are encouraged to wear closed toe.

We left the wording about "encouraged to wear closed toed shoes." When some employees travel to the hospital for meetings, for employee safety, it is suggested they wear closed toed shoes.

XVIII. I work in the SICU and often come and leave wearing scrubs. I feel it is the right thing to do. I disagree with the statement that employees must change into scrubs at work and then leave them here on departure, for numerous reasons. For this part of the policy to work, we must be provided areas to change. I know there are 9 ICU's in the hospital and only the Burn center has a locker room capable of handling changes of clothes. This is not including my department that also utilizes scrub as well or other possible departments. When Gary Park came through this weekend I shared this concern with him also. The purpose is correct and well intended, but did someone consider how it could be accomplished?

It is our understanding that there are different types of scrubs, but UNC Health Care provided scrubs (green) are the only valid ones that are required to be worn at the hospitals and should never be taken home. Employees who purchase their own scrubs are welcome to wear them from home. This may alleviate the concern for needing more changing rooms for our employees.

XIX. My concerns are that we did not specifically address the majority of direct patient care givers who wear scrubs outside of the OR. Can we make a distinction between "hospital issued"

scrubs and those chosen personally by the majority of the patient care providers that work outside the ORs, Burn unit, and L&D?

We only refer to scrubs that are hospital provided scrubs (green color) that should remain at the hospital at all times. The policies that refer to "scrubs" only include those scrubs and not the ones employees purchase on their own and wear to work. Those scrubs must comply with the rest of the policy (no logos, etc.)

XX. Are all hospital supplied and laundered scrubs now green? It's my understanding that in the past some areas such as the Burn Center and L&D have worn blue.

Yes, we were informed that the only official Hospital scrub color was green.

XXI. Please reconsider permitting the use of fragrances etc. Defining excessive is difficult at best and some staff and patients are allergic to scents. I believe we can forgo the use of scents for the time we are at work whether in the patient care areas or elsewhere. As an example, a staff member had used a perfumed soap in the am, was in the OR for 20 minutes and we could detect the perfume 4 hours later--not pleasant for the patient awakening from anesthesia.

We have revised the section that refers to the use of fragrances. We now state: *Employees shall not use body fragrances such as cologne, perfume, talc powder, and after-shave lotions.*

XXII. I think that having a tattoo that is visible is not inappropriate if it is not vulgar or offensive. This leaves me in an awkward position, as the summer approaches, I will look and feel very uncomfortable wearing sweaters and shirts that reach my wrist. I do not want to be in fear of losing my job because of an exposed tattoo. Is the change to visible tattoos going to stay in the new policy?

Yes we are keeping the addition that *visible tattoos and excessive body piercing may offend some customers and co-workers while at the workplace and therefore these shall not be visible.* If you do not want to wear long sleeves, you can wear a band aide over the tattoo or makeup to keep it hidden. In addition, we have received several complaints from our patients and visitors about some of our employees who have tattoos. Many other hospitals such as Duke and Pitt Memorial have policies against visible tattoos.

XXIII. We very much agree with the statements about nose rings and tattoos and that they should be kept covered. They have no place in a professional workplace. Many people need very specific guidance about what is appropriate dress in the workplace. They are confused by what they see in the media. Those trends have seeped into the workplace. The trend in pop culture for women to wear revealing tops is an issue. It really puzzles us that the supervisors of these people ignore their employees who dress in this manner. It is embarrassing and reflects negatively on the institution, the employees and the supervisors. The dress code did not adequately address this issue. The policy only said that employees should not wear "revealing" clothing. In order to achieve compliance and to help supervisors, you're going to need to clearly define what you mean by "revealing".

In the revised dress code we state:

- Excessively tight, revealing, non-professional in appearance, length, and fit of clothing, such as:
 - Backless dresses or tops.
 - Skirts above the knee or have high slits.
 - Pants shorter than mid-calf.
- Casual beach or athletic wear (such as sweat pants, stretch pants/warm up pants, and tights or leggings worn as pants).
- Shirts with revealing neckline, bare midriff tops, and shirts with printed messages, offensive messages, or with an offensive image printed on it.

- Spaghetti strap blouses, unless worn with a jacket.

There is more verbiage than the word “revealing.” Supervisors are expected to enforce the Professional Business Attire policy, but did not have clear guideline to follow for corrective action in the past. We have added a guideline to the end of the revised policy so all employees are held to the same rules and consequences. If one employee sees another wearing what appears to be non-professional dress attire, they should inform the supervisor so the situation can be addressed with that employee.

XXIV. Many people already have tattoos, and while most of them are not visible, some are. I don’t believe it is fair to penalize these people for visible tattoos, nor would it be right to require them to have them removed (a costly and painful procedure). If it is easy to conceal, then an effort could/should be made to conceal, but I personally don’t have a problem with people who are tattooed or pierced, nor do my staff. “Nose rings” should also be more specifically addressed, because many cultures also wear nose studs, not hoops/rings.

We are not asking our employees to remove any tattoos they already have. We are asking that they make an effort to conceal their tattoos by keeping them covered up. During the summer they could wear a band-aid or makeup over the tattoo if they do not wish to wear long sleeves or pants.

We also changed the way pierced body was mentioned and do not go into so much detail: *excessive body piercing may offend some customers and co-workers while at the workplace and therefore these shall not be visible.*

XXV. I think all types of earphones should be prohibited in public or patient care areas or we will have inconsistencies and if staff see individuals from another department doing this, they will think they can too.

Earphones are not allowed except where they are work related and required.