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From: *The eWire*, 03.03.2010

Dress for Success

Fashion and patient care meet

by Lisa Ryan

The oft-quoted Hippocrates once stated that physicians should be "clean in person, well-dressed, and anointed with sweet-smelling unguents." So are hospitalists heeding the father of modern medicine's counsel about physician appearance in the 21st century?

According to an informal survey about workplace attire conducted recently at the-hospitalist.org, a majority of hospitalists are wearing professional apparel while on the job.

In response to the question "What do you typically wear to work?" more than half (54%) of voters said they dress business casual, commonly defined as a dress shirt, slacks, belt, shoes, and socks for men, and a dress shirt, reasonable-length skirt or full-length trousers, shoes, and hosiery for women. Another 13% stated they wear a suit to work. Meanwhile, the other third of respondents said they dress in scrubs (22%), khakis and polo shirts (10%), and jeans and T-shirts (2%).

Most hospitalists at IPC: The Hospitalist Co., a national physician group practice based in North Hollywood, Calif., opt for business-casual dress, says Rafael Barretto, DO, the company's associate medical director for the Michigan region. While IPC does not have a strict dress code, it does give guidelines to its hospitalists and encourages them to avoid wearing sandals, tennis shoes, and jeans to work.

"IPC considers patients' attitudes on physician appearance to be very important. We want our patients to trust that we're going to do the best we can to take care of them," says Dr. Barretto, who cites several research studies, including a report published in the November 2005 issue of *The American Journal of Medicine*, that found patients favor physicians in professional attire.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, perception is reality and hospitalists need to be concerned with how a patient or a patient's family perceives them," says Chris Frost, MD, senior vice president of hospital medicine for TeamHealth Hospital Medicine, a national hospitalist management company in Knoxville, Tenn. TeamHealth has a company-wide policy that discourages its physicians from engaging in unprofessional dress.

"Hospitalists only have one chance to make a first impression. If a hospitalist is dressed poorly, that could overshadow any good patient care he or she provides," Dr. Frost says.

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