Dress Code Considerations for Central Service

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. Explain the relationship between Central Service department attire and patient and personal safety
2. Address considerations pertaining to workplace attire and cultural/religious beliefs that impact personal attire
3. Review challenges that may impact implementation of proper Central Service department attire

With an increasing focus on Central Service (CS) by surveying and governing organizations such as The Joint Commission (TJC), the Department of Health and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the spotlight is now on CS department staff members. Now more than ever, adhering to proper dress code that protects patients and staff members is a must. New Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) standards and a diverse workforce creates new challenges for conformity.

OBJECTIVE 1: EXPLAIN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CENTRAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT ATTIRE AND PATIENT AND PERSONAL SAFETY

Studies have shown that bacteria are continually being shed from the human body. The primary source of bacteria dispersed into the air comes from employee's skin. On average, a human walking for one minute releases 1,000 skin particles. Human bacteria from the skin can be a contaminating source that contributes to surgical site infections (SSIs). These facts demonstrate the importance of proper scrub attire in the CS department. In fact, workplace attire may be the best preventative approach to reducing airborne contaminants, such as skin and hair bacteria.

While sterilization eliminates the risk of contamination from inanimate objects such as surgical instruments, the human body and other inanimate surfaces that can't be sterilized pose another challenge. Therefore, employees must take responsibility for reducing the amount of personal contaminates that may enter the CS area.

Hospitals should provide clean scrub attire to be worn by staff members. According to the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI) and AORN, scrubs should be changed at least daily or when visibly soiled. Hospital-laundered scrubs minimize the risk of home environment contaminants entering the CS area. Employees should not wear scrub attire

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outside the workplace. This is important to prevent bringing contaminants into one's home and endangering family and pets. To further prevent cross contamination, hospital-issued scrubs should be removed when leaving the semi-restricted area, and new scrubs should be donned upon return. If scrubs are inadvertently worn in non-restricted (public) areas, they should be changed before returning to a semi-restricted area.

Additional recommended measures to decrease patient risks for SSIs include:

- All head and facial hair, excluding eyebrows and eyelashes, should be completely covered.
- Jewelry, nail polish and artificial nails should not be worn by reprocessing technicians. Jewelry (including watches) and artificial nails can harbor bacteria, and nail polish can chip off into or onto instruments.
- The new AORN Standard I.c.2 states that CS staff members should wear scrub attire that covers their arms while preparing and packing instruments for sterilization.
- Shoes worn in the CS department should be dedicated to the workplace and not worn elsewhere.

The correct use of proper attire includes personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE protects the CS professional from bloodborne pathogens. The healthcare facility is responsible for providing PPE for all employees who work with contaminated equipment. This responsibility also includes ensuring the proper use of PPE.

Dress code and standard precautions are the primary strategies for preventing healthcare-acquired infections and preventing employees from acquiring infectious diseases.

**OBJECTIVE 2: ADDRESS POSSIBLE SCENARIOS RELATED TO CULTURAL/RELIGIOUS BELIEFS**

The U.S. prospers from its cultural and religious diversity. Many cultures and religions require certain attire that may not conform to traditional CS dress codes. Reasonable accommodations to meet the workplace dress code policy are a requirement set forth by law. In accordance with the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) law, employees have the right to ask their employer for a reasonable accommodation. For some employers, accommodations may pose a challenge to their ability to obey the law while still adhering to the dress code policy.

One such accommodation is the cultural and religious dress of women and their requirement to modestly present themselves outside of their home. Hijab, a customary covering of the hair and neck, may be an accommodation that a healthcare facility will have to meet. In restricted areas where hospital-issued scrub attire is required, a staff member's personal hijab would not be allowed due to AAMI and AORN standards. Reasonable alternatives are available to accommodate both the religious and professional standards. These alternatives include a disposable surgical hood or a reusable, hospital-laundered hijab made of the same material as surgical scrubs.

Another accommodation is the addition of surgical scrub skirts to hide a women's shape. A compromise between the female employee and the employer is that the employee would have to wear hospital-issued scrub pants under a hospital-laundered skirt. This reduces the amount of skin shedding in the restricted area while still adhering to the employee's need to wear a skirt.

In India, it is considered impolite for women to go outside of their home without jewelry. This can pose a problem in the CS area. ANSI/AAMI ST79 states that jewelry and wristwatches should not be worn in the decontamination, preparation or sterilization areas. Jewelry should not be worn because it is not easily or routinely cleaned, and can harbor bacteria and other microorganisms. Jewelry can also fall off and into an instrument tray. Rings may cause holes in gloves, thereby, decreasing their effectiveness. Hand and wrist jewelry may catch on equipment or instruments resulting in injury to workers or damage items and packaging.

**OBJECTIVE 3: REVIEW ROADBLOCKS AND DIFFICULTY IN IMPLEMENTATION**

Employees may contest a dress code
policy because they feel they lose their individuality. A personalized scrub hat or warm-up jacket is a way for the worker to bring some of their personality into the workplace; however, ANSI/AAMI ST79, *Comprehensive guide to steam sterilization and sterility assurance*, states that all personnel entering the decontamination, preparation, sterilization and/or sterile storage areas should wear clean uniforms that are provided by and donned at the facility.

Allowing staff to wear personal hats, which are covered by a hospital-issued disposable bouffant hat, will allow employees to display their individuality. Note: Skull caps do not adequately cover hair on most individuals and, therefore, should not be worn. The new IAHCSMM Central Service Technical Manual, Eighth Edition, clearly states that skull-type caps are no longer suggested for use because they do not always cover all the head hair. Employees may also wear shoes with fun designs and colors, as long as they are designated to the workplace and comply with standards set forth by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and AAMI.

Another barrier to the implementation of dress code compliance may be the financial ramifications on the institution. The initial cost of purchasing additional scrub attire, such as long-sleeved warm-up jackets and reusable hijabs – as well as the daily cost of laundering these additional items – may present as a financial hardship. While these changes do increase expenses for the facility, the return on investment is that the facility may avoid SSIs and other postoperative complications. A cost-benefit analysis should account for the cost of an SSI that may result from dress code noncompliance. Expenses incurred by the facility and patients as the result of an SSI or other postoperative complication should be taken into consideration.

One of the biggest roadblocks to implementing a dress code policy is employee resistance to change. By identifying potential barriers and addressing individual concerns before implementation, management may avoid possible opposition and obtain compliance.

An important step to implementation and compliance is to identify dress code champions who will lead by example. These key individuals uphold the dress code policy on a daily basis and may participate in critical conversations and assist with departmental compliance auditing. Noncompliance and its consequences should be predetermined before implementation of the dress code policy. Staff members should be informed of the policy’s significance and its relationship to SSI risk reduction. Periodic auditing should be performed to avoid the casual drift back to noncompliance.

**CONCLUSION**

Studies have shown there are many contributing factors to SSIs. Workplace attire cannot be singled out as a direct cause of an SSI; however, research has shown it may be the best preventative approach for reducing airborne contaminants, such as skin and hair bacteria. Utilizing dress code policies as a tool helps staff move to compliance, awareness, understanding and cultural change.

Allowing an individual’s personal preference, religion and culture to take precedence over a best practice dress code policy and employee safety allows for an environment that does not prioritize employee and patient safety.

**RESOURCES**


**IAHCSMM ACKNOWLEDGES THE FOLLOWING CS PROFESSIONALS FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE IN THE CIS LESSON PLAN SERIES**

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1. A human walking one minute loses an average ____ skin particles.
   a. 100
   b. 500
   c. 1,000
   d. 10,000

2. Hospital-issued scrubs should be changed:
   a. Daily
   b. When visibly soiled
   c. When returning from a non-restricted area
   d. All the above

3. Human bacteria from skin can contribute to surgical site infections.
   a. True
   b. False

4. All head and facial hair, excluding eyebrows and eyelashes, should be completely covered.
   a. True
   b. False

5. The new Association of periOperative Registered Nurses standard I.c.2 states that Central Service staff members should wear scrub attire that covers their arms while preparing and packing instruments for sterilization.
   a. True
   b. False

6. Adhering to dress code policy is best practice for:
   a. Helping a healthcare organization gain a competitive advantage
   b. Promoting employee and patient safety
   c. Ensuring employee comfort
   d. None of the above

7. Workplace attire may be the best approach for reducing airborne contaminants, such as skin and hair bacteria.
   a. True
   b. False

OBJECTIVE 2

8. Reasonable accommodations to meet the workplace dress code policy are required by law by the:
   a. Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
   b. Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation
   c. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
   d. Occupational Safety and Health Administration

9. An accommodation for a hijab in the restricted area is a:
   a. Bouffant hat
   b. Skull-type hat
   c. Disposable surgical hood
   d. Personal hijab

10. Jewelry should not be worn because it is not easily or routinely cleaned and can also:
    a. Harbor bacteria and other microorganisms
    b. Fall off and drop into an instrument tray
    c. Cause holes in gloves
    d. All the above

OBJECTIVE 3

11. ANSI/AAMI ST79 states that all personnel entering the decontamination, preparation, sterilization and sterile storage areas should:
    a. Wear clean uniforms that are provided by the facility and donned at the facility
    b. Remove their hair covering
    c. Wear a hijab
    d. Remove shoe coverings

    a. True
    b. False

13. Management may improve dress code compliance by:
    a. Allowing employees to determine whether certain dress code policies need to be followed according to policy
    b. Identifying potential barriers and addressing individual concerns employees may have regarding the dress code policy
    c. Demanding compliance
    d. Incentivizing employees with rewards

14. Dress code champions lead by example and:
    a. Uphold the dress code policy on a daily basis
    b. May participate in critical conversations regarding dress code requirements
    c. Assist with departmental dress code compliance auditing
    d. All the above

15. Staff members should be informed of the significance of the dress code policy and its relationship to surgical site infections.
    a. True
    b. False