FACULTY OF BIOLOGY, MEDICINE AND HEALTH
Communication and Dress Code for Students at The University of Manchester

All health and social care professionals are bound by the guidance and rules of conduct set out by the Department of Health and the relevant regulatory or representative body, e.g. the General Dental Council (GDC), General Medical Council (GMC), Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). These in turn define the standards for health and social care education in the UK in settings in which a student is interacting with patients, clients or service users.

Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, including dress code, is an important element in ensuring that these standards are maintained.

Communication

The General Medical Council document “Good Medical Practice” defines the basic components of effective communication as:

- listening to patients, clients and service users, asking for and respecting their views about their health, and responding to their concerns and preferences;
- sharing with patients, clients and service users, in a way they can understand, the information they want or need to know about their condition, its likely progression, and the treatment options available to them, including associated risks and uncertainties;
- responding to the questions of patients, clients and service users, and keeping them informed about the progress of their care;
- making sure that patients, clients and service users are informed about how information is shared within teams and among those who will be providing their care.

All health and social care students should adhere to these principles in communication and other skills training, discussion and assessment. The GMC document also stresses the importance of ensuring, wherever practical, that arrangements are made to meet the language and communication needs of patients, clients and service users.

Dress

It has been shown that non-verbal communication is at least as important as verbal communication, so how a student or health and social care professional appears to patients, clients, service users, relatives, professionals or colleagues may communicate as much as what is said. Extremes of dress compromise communication channels between health and social care students and other patients and professionals, regardless of either party’s gender, or cultural or ethnic background. Styles of dress or articles of clothing that introduce barriers to communication or that compromise, or could potentially compromise, hygiene must be avoided.

Styles of dress should inspire confidence and add to, not detract from, effective and sensitive communication. In general, students should be clean and smartly dressed. Thus the following are not permitted in settings in which a student is interacting with patients, clients or service users:
• T-shirts with slogans;
• Visible body art or nail varnish or extensions²;
• Extremes of hair styles³;
• Body and face jewellery (except small stud earrings and wedding rings)⁴;
• Wrist bands/string⁵;
• Revealing clothing;
• Open-toed sandals (all footwear should be low-heeled and well-fitting round the ankles)⁶;
• Trainers⁷;
• Clothing that covers most of the face⁸. Peaked caps, hoods, and the Niqab are examples of unacceptable clothing in this context. Clothing like the Hijab that only obscures the hair and the top of the head is, however, acceptable. This applies not only in clinical settings but also in educational elements of the programme where communication skills are relevant, such as some types of group work and role-play exercises. The University also reserves the right to check the identity of students who wear clothing that covers most of the face (as defined above) on key occasions such as examinations;
• Strong odours, perfumes or aftershaves⁹.

For cross-infection reasons, NHS Trusts may not permit healthcare workers (including students) to wear wristwatches and ties other than bow ties.

The following are examples of good practice:

• Wearing approved clothing;
• Wearing identification badges or University/Trust identity passes¹⁰;
• Tying back of hair if it interferes with, or adds risk, to a clinical interaction¹¹.

When on NHS premises such as a hospital Trust or a Primary Care Trust, a community setting such as a GP practice, or in the homes of patients, clients and service users, students should dress according to both the University’s and the appropriate local guidelines and regulations.

References

¹ 'Good Medical Practice', GMC 2006, paras 22 and 23
² Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, pages 3-4 (internal document)
³ Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, page 4 (internal document)
⁴ Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, page 3 (internal document)
⁵ Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, page 3 (internal document)
⁶ Health and Safety Policy and Clinical Code of Practice’, Central Manchester and Manchester Children’s University Hospitals NHS Trust Dental Division, 2005, page 17
⁷ Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, page 4 (internal document)
⁸ Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, page 3-4 (internal document)
⁹ Standards for Student Dentists and Student Dental Care Professionals’, University of Manchester School of Dentistry, 2006, page 4 (internal document)
Other Sources of Information

‘Tomorrow’s Doctors’, GMC, 2003
‘Medical Students: Professional Behaviour and Fitness to Practise’, GMC/MSC, 2007