

# Patient Preference for Physician Attire in an Orthopaedic Sports Medicine Outpatient Setting

Joshua Messing, Michael Rocca, Michael Foster<sup>1</sup>, Andrew Tran<sup>2</sup>, Nathan N O'Hara<sup>1</sup>, Natalie Luanne Leong, Sean Meredith, R Frank Henn, Jonathan David Packer<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Maryland, <sup>2</sup>University of Maryland School of Medicine

**INTRODUCTION:** Patient satisfaction is critical to ensuring improved compliance with treatment and clinical outcomes. One method of achieving these goals is to match patient expectations regarding physician appearance in order to build rapport. Previous studies have demonstrated that there is not a uniform preferred attire across all ethnicities, geographic region, ages, healthcare settings, and specialties. Patients in an orthopaedic sports medicine practice, particularly athletes, represent a unique population that has not been previously investigated in physician attire studies.

**METHODS:**

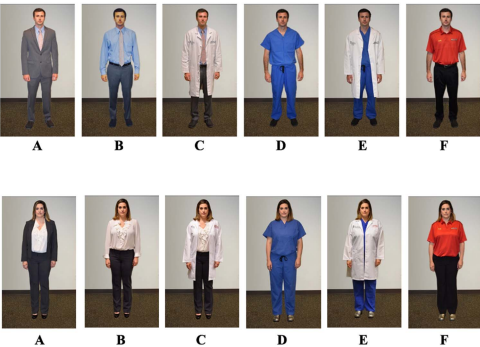
A total of 196 image-based questionnaires were distributed at two orthopaedic sports medicine outpatient clinics to patients 12 years of age or older. Photographs of male and female physicians were included in the questionnaires wearing six outfits; suits, business attire, white coat with business attire, scrubs, white coat with scrubs, and team physician attire. Patients were asked if physician dress is important to them, and accompanying survey questions allowed for patients to rate each attire in 5 categories for both male and female physicians. Categories included how knowledgeable, trustworthy, caring, and approachable the displayed physicians appear as well as confidence in their surgical ability. Study participants were also asked to rank all 6 outfits based on their overall preference and confidence in their surgical expertise.

**RESULTS:**

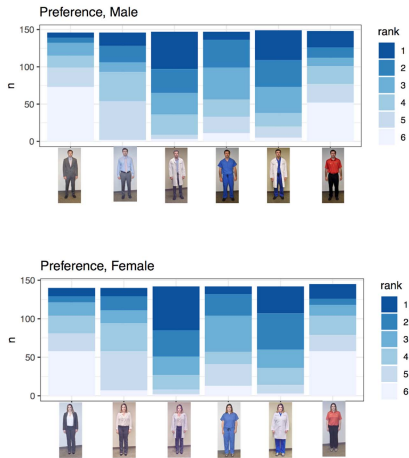
Overall, 33% of respondents agreed that sports medicine orthopaedic surgeon dress is important to them. In total, 20% of respondents agreed that how their sports medicine orthopaedic surgeon dresses influences satisfaction with their care. Patients ranked any attire with a white coat or scrubs more favorably in all 5 attributes compared with the reference group of a male physician in business attire but no suit jacket. Physicians wearing team attire were rated as less knowledgeable, trustworthy, caring, and confident compared with the reference group. Similarly, physicians wearing a suit were rated as less approachable, trustworthy, caring, and confident compared with the business attire.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:**

Most respondents in our study reported that orthopaedic sports medicine surgeons' dress is not important. However, the majority had a preference for both male and female physicians wearing a white coat with either business attire or scrubs compared to other types of dress without a white coat. White coats appear to influence patients views on physicians, as patients may perceive those who wear white coats provide better overall care. The results of our study suggest that it may be useful for orthopaedic sports medicine surgeons to wear white coats in the clinical setting as it may positively affect how patients perceive them.



**Figure 1.** Male and female photos used in the questionnaire given to patients. Patients were asked to rank each clothing style from 1-6 based on surgical expertise as well as overall patient preference. Each patient was then asked to rate each photo from A-F on a scale of 1-10 on how knowledgeable, trustworthy, caring, approachable, and surgically reliable the physician in each photo appeared to be.



**Figure 2.** Physician attire rankings.