

Religion and Belief Code of Practice: Guidance

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Introduction

The main aim of our education programme in the Faculty of Medicine is to ensure students learn to become excellent health professionals. The Faculty of Medicine wishes to facilitate this professionalism. The institution focuses on teaching skills which will enable students to provide outstanding healthcare to their patients and act as competent and helpful members of a healthcare team. We believe this safeguards future patient care, as well as helping students step into employment.

Where possible, the Faculty of Medicine wants all of its students to be included and achieve their potential. This “Religious and Belief Code of Practice” outlines what reasonable accommodations the institution may offer for reasons of religious observance. Such accommodations may be requested by students undertaking healthcare work/study both within the university and while on placement.

Nevertheless, students should be aware that as part of their programme, the Faculty of Medicine trains them for the workplace. This includes understanding the need to comply with the decisions and rules of individual NHS Trusts.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the University of Southampton’s Religion and Belief Policy which can be found at http://www.southampton.ac.uk/diversity/policies/religion_belief.page. Students should also ensure that they adhere to any individual NHS Trust policies while on placement.

Requesting that a reasonable accommodation be made

Should students wish to request that a reasonable accommodation be made on placement, then in the first instance they should approach the Faculty Placement team who will liaise with the clinical sub-deans at the clinical attachment sites.

Where appropriate, the Faculty of Medicine may attempt to negotiate a reasonable accommodation, but this may not always be possible.

Students must be aware that if a requested accommodation contravenes an individual Trust’s own dress code, then they will be expected to abide by that Trust’s decision.

In such circumstances, students should be aware that it will not always be possible, or indeed appropriate, for the Faculty of Medicine to provide an alternative placement.

1. The importance of working with people of both sexes

1.1 Working with patients

We recognise that some students may wish to specialise in treating patients of only one sex once they qualify. However, independent of any individual's future decision, the Faculty of Medicine must train all its students to become competent medical professionals and to reach the 'core competencies' required by their programme of study. Therefore male and female students must examine patients of both genders during their training – this obligation extends to any individuals who may act as a patient during practical examinations such as OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examination).

1.2 Engaging in handshaking with patients

Communication skills are crucial to developing a good professional patient relationship. The Faculty of Medicine examines these skills throughout clinical courses. For many patients in the UK, shaking hands is seen as an important courtesy that helps build rapport so the patient feels comfortable.

However, we make all students aware that patients may have different ways of greeting and teach them how to negotiate these expectations effectively – this includes students who may not wish to shake hands for reasons of religious observance.

Refusing a handshake is not a disciplinary matter but students must always be mindful of not causing offence to a patient. If a patient offers their hand, and a student wishes to offer an alternative greeting they must handle this matter tactfully and sensitively.

1.3 Clinical skills practice

Clinical skills training may involve the examination of student peers in preparation for patient examination. This teaching is important in helping students to gain basic clinical examining skills before they are asked to examine real patients. Students are not required to act as 'patients' to be examined, but it is a cooperative and generous gesture to fellow students should they do so.

Mixed sex groups of students may be taught together. Certain clinical skills, for example, ECG practical, where students would be expected to remove their top half clothing, will be taught in single sex groups.

1.4 Request for a reasonable accommodation to be made

Should any student have a particular concern about the requirements for participating in peer examination during the clinical skills class, that student should contact their teacher privately to discuss the situation. The relevant email addresses will be provided in the Student Handbook for that year.

2. Department of Health Uniforms and workwear policy

2.1 'Bare below the elbows' DH Policy

In 2007 the Department of Health (DH) published its document 'Uniforms and workwear policy: An evidence base for development local policy'*. This policy was updated in 2010.

This document has become widely known as the 'bare below the elbows' policy and it aims to help combat infection and improve patient confidence in the cleanliness of the healthcare environment.

The policy emphasises the vital importance of hand washing as part of infection control. All healthcare individuals who come into contact with patients need to wash their hands between patients; and additional, an individual may need to wash their hands several times when examining or treating the same patient.

When involved in direct patient care activity, all healthcare professionals need to be bare below the elbow. Any sleeve must be able to be rolled or pulled back and kept securely in place during hand-washing and direct patient care activity.

THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE.

* This document may be viewed by pasting the following web address into your browser:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/publicationsandstatistics/publications/publicationspolicyandguidance/DH_114751

2.2 Variation in dress codes

It is important to understand that the development of any dress code is **DECIDED LOCALLY**. Therefore such dress codes remain the responsibility of each individual NHS organisation and as such, students need to be aware that local dress codes may vary between placements. Dress permitted at one placement may not be permitted at another, depending on decisions made by the clinical managers and the local infection prevention and control team.

Each NHS trust has its own regulations. That Trust's clinical managers and infection prevention and control team decide what dress is appropriate. Students should be aware that the Faculty of Medicine cannot recommend any exemption to an NHS Trust's own dress code.

3. Forearms

3.1 Sleeve length



The Faculty of Medicine is aware that for cultural or religious reasons, during times when individuals are not directly treating patients, some students may not wish to expose their forearms.

Some, but not all, NHS trusts have uniforms which include provision for sleeves that can be worn full or three-quarter length when staff are not engaged in direct patient care activity. Students are required to comply with local regulations with regard to the permitted length of sleeves.

On Campus

If full length sleeved uniforms are not available, sometimes disposable over-sleeves, elasticated at the elbow and wrist, may be used.

These must be put on and discarded in the same way as disposable gloves. Strict procedures for washing hands and

wrists as outlined by the Department of Health (see point 2.1 of this document) must still be observed. Such sleeves may be worn on top of scrubbed arms after usual hand washing techniques have been followed. Disposable sleeves must be changed between patients and sometimes several times with one patient, and hand washing techniques stipulated by the Department of Health must be observed.

On placement

Some Trusts may permit students to wear disposable sleeves.

4. Scrubbing in

4.1 Surgical Dress

Students are expected to learn and then demonstrate the correct manner in which to don surgical dress. Donning surgical dress will involve exposing the arms while washing which may be problematic for some female students, if scrubbing is supervised by a male.

4.2 Request for a reasonable accommodation

We are aware that for cultural or religious reasons some females may wish to be observed by a female staff member when scrubbing in. However, students need to be aware that it may not always be reasonable for the Trust to make such an accommodation and provide a female member of staff to supervise such scrubbing in.

5. Alcohol-based hand gel

5.1 Muslims and alcohol based hand gel

When formulating their uniforms and workwear policy the DH sought advice from the 'Muslim Spiritual Care Provision' in the NHS (MSCP) on alcohol-based gel. The MSCP advised that alcohol-based gel contains synthetic alcohol, it does not fall within the Muslim prohibition against natural alcohol (made from fermented fruit or grain). Alcohol-based gel is used widely in Islamic countries within health care settings. It is permissible for Muslims to use such gels.

6. The Hijab: Headscarf

6.1 Wearing the hijab

The institution is aware that for some cultural or religious reasons some females may choose to cover their hair, ears and neck. Some female Muslims may choose to do this by wearing a headscarf (hijab) which covers the hair, ears and neck but which exposes the face.

On Campus

It is permitted to wear a hijab on Campus.

On placement

It is permitted to wear a hijab on placement, provided can be tucked in, and it does not drape over the patient at any point.

Some Trusts may permit students to wear a theatre head-covering to appropriately cover the hair, ears and neck, but which exposes the face, when in surgical theatre.



7. The Turban

7.1 Wearing the turban



The institution is aware that for cultural or religious reasons some male Sikh students may wish to wear a turban.

On Campus

It is permitted to wear a turban on Campus.

On placement

It is permitted to wear a turban on placement.

Some Trusts may permit students to wear a theatre head-covering to appropriately cover the turban, when in surgical theatre.

8. The Yarmulke

8.1 Wearing the Yarmulke

The institution is aware that for cultural or religious reasons some male Jewish students may wish to wear a yarmulke.

On Campus

It is permitted to wear a yarmulke on Campus.

On placement

It is permitted to wear a yarmulke on placement.

Some Trusts may permit students to wear a theatre head-covering to appropriately cover the yarmulke, when in surgical theatre.



9. Face veil

9.1 Niqab and Burka

As part of their religious or cultural observance, some female Muslims may wish to wear a half face veil – a niqab – or a full face veil – a burka.

On Campus

Learning to communicate should be part of the skill set to be achieved by all healthcare professionals. The Faculty of Medicine expects all of its students to demonstrate the same high standard of communication skills.

All students are required to expose their face in situations where this is important for communication with another person. This means that a student's face should be exposed in the following situations:

- In all clinical areas
- When working with teachers
- When working with other students
- When examining a patient as part of an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE)
- For identification purposes including entry to examinations and the library
- When working in anatomical sciences laboratories or other licensed laboratories.

During large lectures, when there is no expectation of interaction with each and every member of the class, students may cover their faces with a niqab or burka.

However, if it is considered that communication would be hampered in a learning environment – for instance if facial cues are needed to understand a student's contribution during small group discussions, role play, clinical skills or communication skills etc, then staff may request that an individual remove their face veil.

It is **NOT** permitted to wear a niqab or burka or any facial covering in **SECURE** areas of the university. A secure area is defined as any area that is managed by access control. Any individual who needs to use their ID card to gain access, may reasonably assume to have entered a secure area.

On Placement

For security reasons, all students are expected to comply with each individual Trust's dress code policy regarding the niqab or burka.

10. Loose dress

10.1 The jilbab and the chador

As part of their religious or cultural observance, in order to avoid showing the contours of their body, some female Muslims may wish to wear a jilbab – a loose dress from neck to ankle which covers the arms including the wrists or a chador (a full-body cloak).

On Campus

It is permitted to wear the jilbab or the chador as long as this does not impede:

- Direct patient contact
- Working with teachers
- Working with other students
- Examining a patient as part of an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).

On Placement

Students are expected to comply with each individual Trust's dress code policy regarding the chador and jilbab.



11. The Kara: Steel Bangle

11.1 The Kara

Both male and female Sikhs wear the Kara; a sacred bracelet made of steel. It is a religious requirement to wear the Kara. Sikhs are not permitted to remove the Kara.



On Campus

It is permitted to wear the Kara on campus.

Sikh students should ensure that their Kara is pushed up the arm and secured in place with tape for hand washing and during direct patient care activity.

On Placement

Some Trusts may allow students to tape up their Kara when in surgical theatre.



12 The Kirpan: Ceremonial Sword

12.1 The Kirpan

A Sikh may be uninitiated or initiated. Initiated male and female Sikhs are required to wear the Kirpan (a ceremonial sword). The Kirpan is carried in a sheath attached to a cloth belt. It is normally worn discreetly under clothes and most people would be unaware that a Sikh was carrying a Kirpan. The size of the Kirpan may differ depending on the personal taste of the initiated Sikh, but may be only a few inches.



Under the 1988 Criminal Justice Act, the Kirpan is **NOT** classified as an offensive weapon, and therefore Sikhs carrying the Kirpan are exempt from prosecution under the Offensive Weapons Act 2008.

On Campus

It is permitted to wear the Kirpan on campus.

The Faculty of Medicine recognises that initiated Sikhs have a right to wear the Kirpan. However, the institution is also mindful that not everyone is familiar with the full significance of the Kirpan. Therefore, as a compromise and in order to avoid undue alarm to others, when on campus, wearers of the Kirpan must ensure this item is worn discreetly.

This means that the Kirpan should remain out of sight by such methods as:

- Tucking it inside clothes.
- Tucking it inside a belt and ensuring the wearer's clothes cover the belt.

Any student wearing a Kirpan should also ensure it is secured so it cannot be easily drawn.

On Placement

If the student needs to scrub in to take part in surgical theatre then some Trusts may require that the student tape the Kirpan to their body.

13 Suitable clothing for laboratory work

13.1 Laboratory coats

Inside laboratories, students must wear laboratory coats over their clothes and must be able to close the coat up completely.

13.1 Trailing clothes

Apart from shoes, students must not wear any clothing that touches the floor as this could potentially pick up contamination from the floor surface, dangle in chemical or biological hazards, or become a trip hazard.

13.2 Personal protective equipment

Individuals working in laboratories must be able to wear the full range of personal protective equipment such as gloves, eye protection such as safety glasses or face shields, on occasion full face masks and in some areas a filtering face mask. Head wear must allow individuals full frontal and peripheral vision at all times and must allow for communication in an unobstructed manner, especially during emergency situations or when alarms are sounding.



14 Identification checks

14.1 ID Security checks

The Faculty of Medicine appreciate that for religious or cultural reasons, some female students may choose to wear a facial covering when travelling around the campus.

However, it is important that all students realise from time to time the institution may wish to verify the identity of an individual in order:

- To allow access to premises
- For the purposes of taking an examination
- To carry out a security check

This is usually done by carrying out a visual check against photographic ID issued by the University of Southampton.

In order to verify the identity of an individual female student with a facial covering, the University will try to make available a female member of staff to perform this visual check in a private room. However, as female students are expected to unveil for teaching sessions in mixed groups, if a female member of staff is not available, then if necessary, female student must be prepared to unveil for a male member of staff performing any such check.

14.2 Obtaining a Photo ID

For reasons similar to those outlined above, some female students may be uncomfortable having their photograph taken for their ID card. In this situation, it may be appropriate to have a female member of staff available to take the photo in a private room (if available).

If a female photographer is not available, an alternative may be that the member of staff or student with a facial covering provides a passport photo which is then verified by a female member of staff in a private room and that this photo is then scanned onto the ID card.

15 Taking part in procedures

15.1 Taking part in abortive procedures/human embryo/fertility treatments

If a student does not wish to participate in any attachments which use abortive procedures on human foetuses and other human embryo and fertility treatments they can ask for a reasonable accommodation to be made .

Blood transfusions

Members of some religions such as Jehovah Witnesses are prohibited from receiving blood transfusions. However, in order to meet core competencies, any student training as a clinician at the University of Southampton will be expected to take part in procedures that involve taking blood from other – such training may not be avoided.

16 Practising your religion

16.1 Practising your religion

For those students who practice prayer, there are facilities provided on campus. There is a Muslim prayer room under the West Refectory, and Friday prayers are held in the Cube in the Students' Union. The Chaplaincy is home to the multi-denominational Christian chaplains but welcomes staff and students of all faiths for prayer or to sit in quiet contemplation. There are both male and female prayer rooms available on the UHS Trust site at Southampton General Hospital, situated in Centre Block, D Level. Most hospitals will also offer this facility – please check with your Placement Administrator.

If you wish to pray at certain times of the day while on Placement it is important that you make arrangements in advance with the Placement Coordinator/Administrator. Such arrangements must take into account the affect this may have on patients or other members of staff.

16.2 Multifaith Societies

The University of Southampton is a diverse and lively community of many different faiths. The Chaplaincy, while mostly involved with the various Christian group on campus, is a place for people of all faiths to meet, and members of the other student faith organisations and societies are welcome to use the facilities.

Please check the Chaplaincy web pages at <http://www.chaplaincy.soton.ac.uk/multifaith.php> for more information on the various groups and societies.

More information can also be found at the following link:

17 Food

17.1 Food on campus

People with special dietary needs are welcome to bring their own food with them. The University of Southampton does not provide Kosher or Halal food. The University shop does not specify whether their meat is Halal or not. The University is happy for its students to make their own arrangements for food.

17.2 Food on placement

If any student has special dietary requirements due to religious observance, then the student must be prepared to make their own arrangement with regard to food. Placements will not be changed because of an individual's dietary requirements.

18 Keeping a record of each student's request

18.1 Monitoring

All programme administrators will keep a record of all student requests for religious accommodations to be made on that student's file. This information will include:

- The student's programme
- The student's religion or belief
- The nature of the accommodation requested
- If the accommodation was made, how so
- If not, why not – so as to record the 'objective justification' to making such an accommodation should the institution receive a legal challenge.

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