

The physician's white coat: Iconic and comforting or likely covered in germs?

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Credit: University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

A new study from The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston department of Obstetrics and Gynecology has found that although the physicians' white coat is one of the most iconic symbols of the trade, whether or not they wear it, doesn't impact patients' satisfaction. The findings are available in the *American Journal of Perinatology*.

Past studies have shown that a physician's attire affects patients' trust and confidence in them. Patient satisfaction and quality of communication between patient and physician are linked with better patient care and outcomes.

However, coats worn throughout a day filled with treating patients—some of whom have contagious illnesses—has been shown to carry infectious agents that can be spread around.

The researchers conducted the study to find out if or how the white coat affects physician-patient communication and satisfaction among new mothers in the postpartum unit at the hospital.

All of the women were randomly assigned to teams of rounding physicians who either wore a white coat or not but beyond this, their care was the same. Shortly before discharge from the hospital, the patients completed a modified Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems survey. The survey is the only national, standardized survey used to assess [patient satisfaction](#).

"Our study showed that not wearing a [white coat](#) by the physicians team, didn't impact the communication between patients and physicians nor patients' satisfaction," said Dr. Mauricio La Rosa, principal investigator of the study. "Actually, 40 percent of the [patients](#) couldn't remember if their physicians were wearing white coats or not."

In a prior study that was not conducted at UTMB, 18 percent of the physicians' white coats were colonized with antibiotic-resistant staphylococcus aureus.

Twenty five percent of all hospital admission in the U.S. are related to pregnancy, so any intervention that improves pregnant or postpartum women's [satisfaction](#) may have a great impact on health care. Moreover, [health care professionals](#) must determine the benefits of any interventions whether old or new before widespread utilizations.

More information: Nicholas Spencer et al, The Effect of Wearing White Coats on Patients' Appreciation of Physician Communication during Postpartum Rounds: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *American Journal of Perinatology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1055/s-0038-1660470](https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0038-1660470)

Provided by University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

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