DRESS CODE

1. PURPOSE. To provide guidelines for the appearance of medical center personnel in order to present a professional and well-groomed appearance which inspires the confidence of patients, visitors, families and staff. These guidelines are applicable to all uniformed and non-uniformed employees. This policy covers all medical center employees (full and part-time), volunteers, work without compensation (WOC) employees, and contract personnel, while on official status in the medical center.

2. POLICY. The policy of the medical center is to project pride and self-awareness to the Veterans and other customers we serve. Each employee’s personal appearance contributes to the overall image of the medical center as a provider of quality health care. It is the policy of this medical center that employees wear appropriate clothing suitable to the professional health care environment and those employees maintain standards of personal hygiene and grooming standards that promote safety and enhance infection control.

3. ACTION.

   a. Responsibilities.

      (1) ACOS/Service Chiefs/Managers and Supervisors are responsible for reinforcing this policy to their employees. They are responsible for setting an example, as well as monitoring their employees’ dress and discussing questionable or inappropriate clothing with the employee. Such discussions will be conducted in a private setting, away from other employees, Veterans, and visitors.

      (2) All Employees are responsible for understanding and adhering to the guidelines contained in this policy. They will be aware of dress expectations for their work areas and are required to meet those expectations. If they have questions about the appropriateness of any particular dress item, they should discuss this with their supervisor.

   b. Procedures.

      (1) Employees are expected to wear clothing that is suitable for the professional health care environment and to present themselves in a manner that reflects positively on the medical center.

      (2) Employees are expected to present a clean and neat appearance. Individual services may have policies more specific than the standards outlined below and may include the wearing of a specific uniform that is considered generally accepted professional standard. In these instances, AFGE, Local 96, will be notified of the proposed policy and afforded the right to represent and negotiate on behalf of the bargaining unit employees affected by the proposed policy.
(3) Employees required to wear uniforms shall wear the complete uniform as ascribed by the Service or professional office while in a duty status.

(4) If the issued apparel is a lab coat or smock, clothing worn under this must meet the standards outlined in this policy.

(5) Exceptions to these standards may be made during periods of inclement weather, in recognition of special events, or during performance of duties not typically associated with a particular position. The dress code may be relaxed on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of management prior to non-code clothing being worn.

(6) Employees must follow the service guidelines for their work areas, especially where health, sanitation and safety are a consideration. The following are the medical center’s standards for personal appearance.

   (a) Clothing. All clothing must be clean, neat, and professional. It is never appropriate to wear stained, wrinkled, frayed, clothing with rips or holes or revealing clothing to the workplace.

   (b) Skirts/Dresses/Blouses

       1. The length of all skirts cannot be more than 2 inches above the knee while standing. Skirt slits cannot exceed 1/4 of the total length of the skirt, and a dress slit cannot be more than 2 inches above the knee.

       2. Dresses/blouses with low necklines displaying revealing cleavage, bare shoulders or bare backs are not appropriate in the healthcare environment, e.g., evening/party or sun dresses, unless worn with a jacket. Spaghetti-strap dresses must be worn with a jacket.

       3. Garments shall not be sheer or see-through. No bare midriff garments will be allowed.

   (c) Pants

       1. Pants and slacks should not be body contouring or form/tight fitting. Pants must be worn at the natural waist line.

       2. Jogging suits, sweat suits, warm-ups, shorts, bib overalls (except VA issued as part of a uniform, i.e. painter's uniform), stretch (Lycra®) clothing, leggings/tights, and stirrup pants are not appropriate dress in the medical center.

   (d) Shirts

       1. Casual shirt, golf/polo shirts, sweaters and turtlenecks are acceptable. T-shirts should be clean and wrinkle free with no offensive pictures/statements and free of personal view type statements.
2. Inappropriate items include: tank tops, sweatshirts, shirts with large lettering, slogans, halter-tops, muscle shirts, unless worn under another blouse, shirt, jacket or jumper. Clothing having sexual, political and/or negative connotations written or pictured is not permitted.

(e) Footwear

1. Shoes should be clean, no holes/tears, intact, and compatible with the medical center environment and assigned duties.

2. Flip-flops, thongs, and house slippers are prohibited.

3. Heels should not be higher than 3 inches for safety reasons.

(f) Jewelry

1. Employees who provide direct patient care or work around machinery may not wear hanging jewelry, hair ornaments, pins, neck chains that dangle loosely from the neck, artificial nails, or artificial eyelashes that may constitute a patient or personal safety hazard.

2. Jewelry may ONLY be worn on ears, around neck, wrist, fingers and ankles. Excessive jewelry (i.e. oversized or large dangling earrings in patient care areas) is not allowed.

3. Jewelry that interferes with patient care will not be tolerated.

4. No visible body piercing/jewelry, except for ears.

(g) Others

1. Hats and caps are not to be worn while inside the medical center or buildings associated with the medical center.

2. Religious Exceptions. Reasonable accommodations may be made on an individual basis for employees with properly documented religious needs. Requests with supporting documentation should be submitted to the employee’s Service Chief/Supervisor or Manager.

3. Buttons or clothing displaying partisan political advertising and/or slogans that may be offensive, insulting or profane, non-healthcare or medical center related, and buttons displaying personal opinions or views are not permitted. VA employees are subject to the provisions of the Hatch Act, which places some restrictions on political activities of federal employees. It is important to note that VA regulations and policy prohibit all partisan activities on VA premises which interfere with the VA mission of care and treatment of veterans and service to beneficiaries. If you have questions as to whether particular activities are permissible, please discuss your concerns with your supervisor before undertaking the activity in question. If you would like additional information on the Hatch Act, it may be obtained from the OSC website at www.osc.gov/hatchact.htm.
4. Name Badges. Identification badges must be worn above the waist at all times with the employee’s name and photograph clearly visible.

5. Medical Exceptions. Deviation from this policy for a medical condition will require a physician’s statement that includes a time period for the exception.

c. Service Chiefs/Managers and Supervisors. Service Chiefs/Managers and Supervisors are responsible for reinforcing this policy to their employees and assuring employees in the work environment are meeting the standards of personal appearance. Supervisors will follow the procedures described in the compliance section of this policy.

d. All Employees. Employees are responsible for compliance with the standards contained in this policy. If they have questions about the appropriateness of any particular dress item, they should discuss this with their supervisor. All employees will be furnished a copy of this policy. New employees shall be furnished a copy of this policy during new employee orientation.

e. Compliance.

   (1) When employees are in conflict with the established dress code policy, a good faith effort will be made with the employee, supervisor, and union representative (if requested) to resolve the conflict at the lowest level.

   (2) Both the union and management recognize there may be differences of opinion concerning what is appropriate. The principles of this policy will serve as a guide in resolving these differences.

   (3) If necessary, supervisors may authorize administrative leave sufficient for the employee to go home and return in compliance for the first offense. Subsequent non-compliance will result in counseling and/or progressive discipline as necessary and may include sending the employee home.

4. REFERENCES: None.

5. RESCISSION: MCM 00-08, dated March 31, 2011

6. RESPONSIBILITY: The Medical Center Director or designee (00) is responsible for the contents of this Medical Center Memorandum.

7. REVIEW DATE: June 16, 2018

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