Toronto Academic
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PREAMBLE

The Standards for Religious Attire document set out to harmonize standards and shared expectations related to clothing worn by religiously observant individuals in areas with sterile spaces e.g. operating rooms. The document focuses on individuals belonging to Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish faiths. However, in the spirit of accommodation, all faith traditions should be safely and respectfully subject to the same considerations.

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STANDARDS FOR RELIGIOUS ATTIRE FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS, LEARNERS AND VOLUNTEERS IN HOSPITAL AREAS WITH STERILE PROCEDURES (ASP)

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RATIONALE

The right to be treated equally based on creed, and to hold and practice creed beliefs of one's choosing freely, are fundamental human rights in Ontario, protected by the Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*)[1,2,3] and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*[4]. Based on the *Code,* employers and service providers have the legal duty to accommodate sincerely held religious/spiritual beliefs up to the point of undue hardship (e.g. factors of cost, health & safety).

The purpose of this document is to set out, and harmonize among TAHSN hospitals, standards and shared expectations related to clothing worn by religiously observant individuals acting in hospital Areas with Sterile Procedures (ASP), such as operating rooms. We recognize that religiously observant individuals have unique rights and responsibilities when it comes to upholding aseptic practices while also staying true to their respective faiths. This document is intended to support the upholding of these rights and responsibilities while ensuring safety of the healthcare worker and appropriate infection prevention and control practices.

These standards do not address other religious and spiritual practices that go beyond clothing, and do not address patients, families, visitors and others who may be present in a hospital setting.

BACKGROUND

Inclusion of health care workers, learners and volunteers from diverse backgrounds not only helps maintain high quality patient care but helps to create a hospital environment in which all feel welcome and respected. Meaningful and full inclusion of people with diverse backgrounds necessitates human rights-based accommodation of religious/spiritual beliefs and practices.

All Toronto/GTA hospitals have health care workers, learners, and volunteers, who choose to express their respective faiths in visibly identifiable ways. For example, there are Muslim women who wear the *hijab* (scarf covering the hair and neck), Sikh men and women who wear the *dastaar* (turban), and

Jewish men who wear the *kippah* (head cover) and Jewish women who wear *tichel* (head scarf) or wig. Other religious practices include but are not limited to religiously observant men maintaining a beard, men and women keeping long hair, and Sikh men and women wearing the *kara* (steel bracelet) and *kirpan* (small sword).

Practitioners of some religions are obliged to dress modestly and/or with specific attire at all times in public, including the workplace. These may include e.g. practicing Muslim women who wear clothing which covers the extremities down to the wrists and down to the ankles or religious Jewish women who wear clothes that cover below the knees and may avoid wearing pants.

Although some TAHSN hospitals' policies address religious practices related to attire in ASP, there is variation among hospitals, and no unifying standard. In the last several years' discriminatory practices have occurred related to religious attire in ASP at TAHSN hospitals. This has included, but is not limited to, forcing Muslim women to remove their hijab and/or denying access to the operating room.

TAHSN HOSPITAL STANDARDS FOR NECESSARY ACCOMMODATIONS IN ASP

The following sections state hospital practice standards for religious attire for Muslim, Sikh and Jewish individuals who hold sincere belief in expressing their religion through their attire. Muslim, Sikh, and Jewish individuals have been highlighted for reasons including but not limited to expressions of interest from these groups in harmonized protocols to eradicate experiences of misunderstanding, micro-aggression, discrimination and harassment in the learning and working environment. For other religious/spiritual faith groups and individuals that hold their own beliefs in this regard, observed practices and requests for accommodation should be handled according to the requirements under the *Code*[1,2].

Muslim Individuals

In order to fulfill religious obligations and uphold aseptic practices, Muslim women working in ASP will wash their *hijabs* prior to use and reserve certain *hijabs* specifically for ASP (i.e. these will not be worn outside). These *hijabs* will be non-lint producing and well-secured to prevent contamination of environment[5]. Alternatively, disposable bouffant caps or surgical hoods may be worn over *hijabs*.

In order to cover the arms down to the wrists, long sleeved T–shirts under scrubs or hospital-issued jackets or gown over scrubs will be worn. These will also be laundered before each use and worn only in the sterile area. The arms will be exposed briefly for the purpose of scrubbing-in; during this time, the sleeves of long-sleeved T-shirts or jackets or gowns will be pulled up above the elbows. Then, the long-sleeve surgical gown will be donned. In the process of scrubbing out, surgical gown will be removed first. This will require brief exposure of arms. After scrubbing out properly, the sleeves of the long-sleeved T shirt or jacket will be pulled back down.

These practices are in agreement with those developed by the British Islamic Medical Association's Hijab and Bare Below the Elbows Toolkit[6,7], which has been widely adopted across the UK and in accordance with the multicultural guide published by American College of Surgeons[8].

For Muslim men who maintain a beard as an expression of faith, beard covers will be worn over facial hair[7].

Sikh Individuals[9]

In order to fulfill religious obligations and uphold aseptic practices, Sikh women and men working in ASP will wash their turbans prior to use, and reserve certain turbans specifically for ASP (i.e. these will not be worn outside the hospital). These turbans will be non-lint producing. Alternatively, a disposable bouffant cap or surgical hoods may be worn over the turban[6].

Sikh individuals with facial hair will wear beard covers over facial hair[8]. The *kirpan* may be worn underneath clothing. The *kara* will be removed prior to scrubbing in and will be placed back on the wrist after scrubbing out of the ASP.

Jewish Individuals

In order to fulfill religious obligations and uphold aseptic practices, Jewish men and women working in ASP will wash *kippahs* and *tichels* prior to use and reserve certain *kippahs* and *tichels* specifically for ASP (i.e. these will not be worn outside hospital). These *tichels* will be non-lint producing and well-secured to prevent contamination of environment. Alternatively, bouffant covers or surgical hoods may be worn over *kippahs* and *tichels*[8]. Jewish women who wear wigs, bouffant covers or surgical hoods can be used to fully cover them[8].

Orthodox Jewish women who choose to cover arms below the elbows will follow the procedures described above for Muslim women[7,8].

For Jewish men who maintain a beard as an expression of faith, beard covers will be worn over facial hair[8].

Available Space:

To have private available space or time (e.g., behind a curtain or a movable barrier) by one of the sinks where an observant Muslim or Jewish woman who needs to uncover her arms temporarily to scrub in can do so without any men being inadvertently able to see her (she can be watched by a female scrub nurse if required).

Future considerations: Organizations should look into resources to provide laundering of religious attire at a health care-accredited laundry facility**.**

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