

Study challenges idea that clinicians should dress formally to be taken seriously

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Clinicians can ditch the suit and tie and instead dress comfortably when attending patients in their practice, according to findings from a recent study.

Back pain researchers from Neuroscience Research Australia assessed the impact of a clinician's dress code on 128 participants in a blinded, randomised controlled study. All participants received the same treatment information about a separate back pain study in which they were about to participate. However, they received this information from one of two physiotherapists wearing either a formal suit with tie, or a collared t-shirt and dress pants.

When quizzed after receiving information about the back pain treatment they were about to receive, patients were asked to rate how credible they thought the treatments were, answering questions from the Credibility and Expectancy Questionnaire.

The study found evidence that a clinician's attire does not influence perceptions of treatment credibility.

"Most physicians prefer to wear formal attire whereas allied health [clinicians](#), such as physiotherapists, tend to dress casually or in uniforms," says lead author Adrian Traeger. "We thought that many clinicians might reconsider their [dress code](#) if the evidence suggested that formal attire affected the credibility, and therefore the efficacy, of their treatment. However, it seems to be that clothing choice doesn't

have as a great an impact on a patient's perception of the treatment's credibility as we thought.

"We didn't include a white coat and stethoscope, or jeans and facial piercings in our study because we wanted to be able to generalise our findings to what you'd expect to find in most clinical settings."

Previous studies have indicated that if a treatment is regarded as credible by a patient, they are likely to adhere to the [treatment](#) more, experience greater patient satisfaction and report improved physical function. Even inert treatments, such as placebo interventions used in clinical trials, can affect health outcomes if patients perceive them to be credible.

Researchers say this study suggests that in health care communication, the substance of information provided to [patients](#) is probably more important than a clinician's physical appearance. "Clinicians should feel confident that they can dress comfortably without fear of losing [credibility](#)," says Adrian Traeger.

This study was published in the journal *Patient Education and Counselling*.

Provided by Neuroscience Research Australia

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