

Patients don't mind if doctors sport tattoos or piercings

July 2 2018

Patients don't mind if their emergency care doctors sport tattoos or piercings, or both, suggests an observational study published online in *Emergency Medicine Journal*.

Evidence of visible body art seems to have no discernible impact on what they think of their doctor's professionalism or competence, the findings show.

Previous research on patient attitudes towards [doctors'](#) appearance has indicated a preference for traditional attire, but these studies have been based primarily on photos and written descriptions and few have involved actual clinical practice, say the researchers.

They therefore quizzed nearly 1000 [emergency care](#) adult patients in a trauma centre in a large urban area of Pennsylvania, USA, about their doctors' appearance after they had had a consultation with him/her.

The seven doctors taking part in the 9-month long study variously wore fake body piercings or tattoos, or both, or no body art, in addition to their usual hospital scrubs.

Their patients were specifically asked what they thought of their physician's competence, professionalism, caring attitude, approachability, trustworthiness and reliability, by rating these qualities on a five point scale.

The patients were told that the survey aimed to find out how the centre could better provide courteous and competent medical care, with the aim of improving their experience, rather than what they thought of doctors with visible tattoos and piercings.

Two doctors didn't enrol enough patients in the study. But of the five who did, patients rated all the studied qualities highly more than 75 percent of the time, irrespective of whether or not they were treated by a doctor wearing visible body art.

Neither age nor gender, educational attainment nor ethnicity seemed to have any bearing on the responses.

Tattoos and piercings are becoming increasingly common, say the researchers: in 2016, more than a third of young US adults (18-25) and four out of 10 of those aged 26-40 said they had at least one [tattoo](#). And the prevalence of body piercings was 14 percent in 2014.

"Given these statistics, those who enter the medical field today are more likely to have body art than [medical professionals](#) did previously," write the researchers. "Despite this, dress codes and institutional policies at most hospitals still prohibit medical professionals from having visible body art."

Concerns that body art might undermine perceived professionalism or patient satisfaction with care would seem to be groundless, they add.

The researchers point out that they didn't ask patients whether they had [body](#) art themselves, nor whether they disapproved of it but were able to get past this on the strength of the interaction they had with their doctor, or whether they genuinely didn't mind it.

And emergency care patients may not be the same as other types of

patients, they acknowledge. But they nevertheless conclude that on the basis of their findings: "Physician tattoos and facial piercings were not factors in [patients'](#) evaluations of physician competence, professionalism or approachability."

More information: An observational study of patients' attitudes to tattoos and piercings on their physicians: the ART study, *Emergency Medicine Journal* (2018). [DOI: 10.1136/emmermed-2017-206887](https://doi.org/10.1136/emmermed-2017-206887)

Provided by British Medical Journal

Citation: Patients don't mind if doctors sport tattoos or piercings (2018, July 2) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-07-patients-dont-mind-doctors-sport.html>

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