

Dress to impress

Here, we look at the dos and don'ts when it comes to your appearance in clinic

A Facebook post by a trainee dental nurse caught our eye recently. Having been reprimanded by an assessor for not wearing make up and therefore appearing 'unapproachable and unhappy', she appealed to fellow DNs to advise.

She writes: 'I'm a trainee dental nurse and today I have a new assessor watch me at work, she was happy with how I did everything however she complained about my appearance she said I HAVE to wear a bit of make up (I am completely natural for work) and she said I look 'unapproachable' because I'm not wearing it? Also, my hair was in a bun and I had baby hairs sticking out and she told me I had to hairspray them back so it looks as tight as possible is this all correct? I've been working at my practice for six months – and none of the other nurses do this – and my practice has never complained. However, my assessor says I must do it at all times or I'll be in trouble! I don't feel comfortable wearing make-up for work, it takes me too long to do and I just cannot be bothered with it. Does that make me look unapproachable and unhappy at work?'

This post set Facebook alight last month, with many dental nurse colleagues horrified at the suggestion that make up was a prerequisite of professionalism. From urges to report the assessor to reassurance that a 'tidy appearance' was what was needed, everyone agreed the advice was misguided at best and (one suggested) 'bullying' at worse. As one dental nurse replied: 'As long as your hair is tied back and your uniform is clean, no jewellery and your nails are kept short and unpainted it's fine! I would never say to a nurse they should wear makeup! It's a personal choice.'

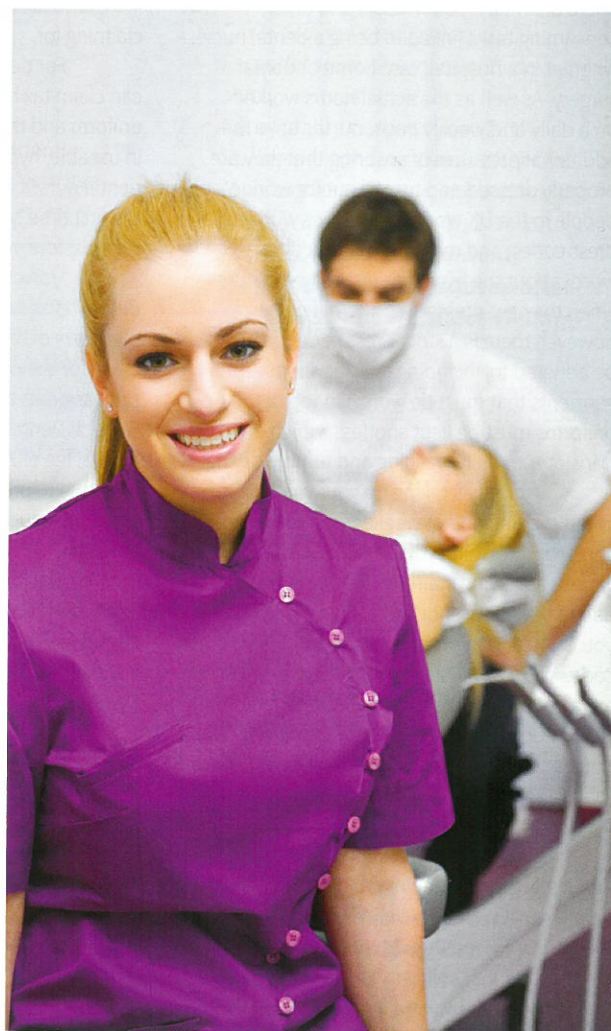
So, what do the experts say? The National Examining Board for Dental Nurses (NEBDN) in its National Diploma in Dental Nursing Guidance, outlines guidelines as the following:

- Uniform (as determined by practice policy) should be clean and smart.
- Sleeves should allow staff to be bare below the elbows.
- Hair should be short or tied back and off the collar.

- Tattoos should ideally be discreet and inoffensive.
- Small stud earrings (and other piercing to be discreet).
- No other jewellery should be worn although a wedding band may be permitted.
- Shoes should be comfortable and protective i.e. not heels and not canvas.
- Facial hair should be kept short and neat.
- Nails short and free of any nail varnish. Our policy includes acrylics/gel but, as long as they are secure and gloves are worn, then practice policy may differ.

Clare Roberts is deputy chair of the NEBDN's Diploma Committee and also Dental Nurse Research and Development Manager at the Dental Team Education Centre in London. She says: "NEBDN Best Practice guidance around dress code (for the OSCE – practical part of the diploma exam) is primarily concerned with decontamination, which is generally reflected in practice (for full guidance notes, visit nebdn.org/sites/default/files/Diploma%20Examination%20Guidance%20Jan15.pdf).

'Dental nurses should discuss their queries with their practice manager if in any doubt. In terms of the infection control aspects, they could seek advice from local infection control nurse or visit www.nhsemployers.org.



'If they breach infection control guidelines, then ultimately it may affect CQC rating for the practice or may contribute to a patient complaint to the GDC, but otherwise it is a local issue and employer disciplinary procedures may be implemented.'

What the law says

Sarah Buxton is Dental Employment & HR Associate Solicitor at FTA Law. She adds: 'Dress codes are often used in the workplace, mainly for health and safety reasons, or so that the staff can be easily identified. It is important to note that a dress code policy must not be discriminatory in respect of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 for age, disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.'