Who’s My Nurse?: New Dress Code Helps Patients Identify Caregivers

**Organization Name:** Western Maryland Health System  
**Type:** Acute Care Hospital

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**IDENTIFICATION:**

Patients often reported that they had difficulty identifying the members of their health care team because “they’re all wearing scrubs.” The inability to distinguish nurses from housekeeping or dietary personnel by reading name badges resulted in delayed responses to patient’s requests because they are being routed through multiple channels before reaching the nurse. This could lead to an increased safety risk if a patient/family were to report significant health concerns such as chest pain to a non-member of the health care team simply because they are wearing scrubs.

Patients, visitors, and other hospital staff also stated that the inconsistency and varied styles of scrubs/uniforms created, in some instances, a chaotic and sloppy appearance throughout the health system. Also, we were moving into a new facility on November 21, 2009 and wanted our staff to have the same fresh polished appearance as the new hospital.

With these concerns in mind, the Chief Nurse Executive established a committee to develop alternatives to the varied scrub colors and designs.

**PROCESS:**

The Professional Apparel Committee (PAC) was organized to research solutions that would be appropriate for our institution and acceptable to our staff. This committee consisted of fourteen frontline staff nurses, six nurse managers, and was chaired by a coordinator from the Education and Project Management Department.

A literature review was performed to identify current trends. Various regional health care facilities were contacted and asked to share their current practice. The PAC then compiled a list of possible solutions, which included the following: change to all white uniforms for nurses; design a badge with larger credentials; or, designate a specific scrub color for nursing.

After careful consideration, the committee unanimously voted to designate a specific scrub color for the nursing department employees. The committee surveyed nursing staff to identify what color would be acceptable as their signature color. We received over 300 responses, which approximated 30% of our nursing staff.
SOLUTION:

The overwhelming response to the survey indicated that the most popular color for nurses was navy blue and white. We have a few registered nurses who have always worn the traditional all white uniforms; therefore, white was added to the navy to accommodate any nurse who wished to wear all white. The most popular color for nursing assistants was ceil blue, and the most popular color for unit secretaries was burgundy tops and tan pants. The color choices were limited to solid colors absent of any designs and/or patterns.

The decision to accept these chosen colors was made by the PAC and presented to the Chief Nurse Executive and the Nurse Administrative Council for approval. After approval was obtained, a date of November 1, 2009 was confirmed for all nursing staff to begin wearing the new uniform colors.

In an effort to assist our staff with obtaining new color appropriate scrubs; we hosted a uniform sale with two local vendors that accepted payroll deduction for purchases. Staff reported that this was a great opportunity for them to purchase the designated color scrubs without it being a financial burden.

After this change was communicated throughout our organization, other departments began choosing colors for their staff to wear for easy identification. Human Resources assisted the department directors with making these changes.

OUTCOMES:

In addition to responses from our patient satisfaction surveys, patient advocates who interview patients throughout the course of their hospital stay have positive things to say. They state that patients indicate designating disciplines by specific uniform colors provides comfort and reassurance while making it easier for them to identify who is providing their care. Also, staff appears more organized and presents a more professional and unified team.