

PART **2**

Professionalism in the Health System Pharmacy



Appearance and Attitude

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be able to

1. Identify proper work attire for a hospital pharmacy setting
2. List proper grooming standards
3. Define attitude and mindset
4. Describe proper attitude and mindset in pharmacy technician practice

KEY TERMS

Appearance

Attitude

Business casual

Dress code

Entitlement

Grooming

Humbleness

Mindset

Perception

Scrubs

INTRODUCTION

The appearance of a pharmacy technician projects an impression of the quality of that employee. The attitude of the employee complements that appearance. Together, these two traits can be a critical factor in the success of a pharmacy technician. This appearance and attitude not only are representative of the employee, but also are a reflection on the department itself, as well as a reflection on the hospital when viewed by patients and visitors to the facility.

APPEARANCE

Appearance can be defined as the outward or visible aspect of a person. The aspects discussed in this chapter deal with clothing and grooming standards. Every hospital has its own specific **dress code**, or rules for appropriate attire. This chapter will describe the most common standards included in these dress codes for the health system setting. These rules may be stricter than those at a given facility, but should represent at least a minimum standard. If so, it is always easier to relax higher standards than to strengthen lower ones.

Clothing

The types of clothing required for hospital employees are predominately gender neutral, requiring the same types of clothing for both male and female employees. Scrubs are the preferred attire in a hospital setting, but business casual is also possible.

Scrubs

Scrubs are lightweight garments that were originally designed as sterile garb for use in an operating room. They were typically one color, such as baby blue or mint green. They are still used in operating rooms, but now are also worn by nurses, nursing assistants, respiratory therapists, pharmacy technicians, and other health system staff members (**Figure 2-1**). Numerous colors, styles, and patterns are available. Retail stores exist that are devoted exclusively to selling scrubs for healthcare professionals. There are some general rules to be observed regarding the use of scrubs in a hospital setting:

- OR (operating room) scrubs are reserved for operating room personnel and are for use in the surgery department only. These are identified by a specific

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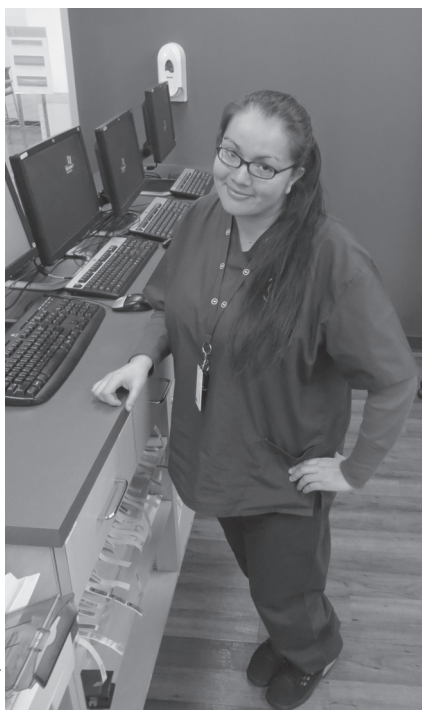


FIGURE 2-1 A technician wearing scrubs.

color per facility. A pharmacy technician should have other types of scrubs for use in the hospital, unless their duties take them into the OR on a constant basis.

- Undershirts are recommended, with long-sleeved t-shirts or thermal garments used in cold months and plain t-shirts in warmer months. This is so common that drug manufacturers have been known to produce long-sleeved t-shirts with the name and logo of their product along the sleeves, specifically to be worn under scrub tops.
- Some hospitals have policies restricting or prohibiting the wearing of plain black scrubs in the facility. Even if your facility does not have a policy, it is generally not recommended. Dressing entirely in black can be associated with mourning

and funerals, which can be very distressing to patients or visitors to the hospital, where the death of a patient is a possibility.

- Most scrubs are wrinkle free or wrinkle resistant. If there are wrinkles, then they *must be ironed* before use. No matter how nice the material or design of the scrub, wrinkles can ruin the image of professionalism.
- Sagging is not acceptable. Scrub pants should be at hip level *at all times*.

Business Casual

Business casual attire is a style of clothing worn by businesspeople at work that is slightly more casual than traditional formal attire (**Figure 2-2**). Although this is not the most common attire for pharmacy technicians in a hospital setting, business casual clothing is acceptable in lieu of scrubs. This is usually the attire worn by pharmacists and doctors, and it is possible to be mistaken for one if choosing this type of clothing to wear. See **Table 2-1** for

a description of business casual attire for men and women.

Footwear

Business casual footwear consists of dress shoes for men and flats or low heels for women. While wearing scrubs, sneakers or tennis shoes are acceptable forms of footwear. This is convenient because the majority of a pharmacy technician's day is spent standing or walking throughout the facility. Therefore, comfort is a major concern. Some notes on footwear:

- Sneakers should be kept clean and in good condition.
- White sneakers are usually standard for healthcare workers who directly interact with patients (e.g., nurses, nursing assistants). It is used to help identify blood spills, but usually is *not* a requirement for pharmacy staff.
- Laces should not be overly long in order to prevent a trip hazard.



Courtesy of Mark G. Bunton.

FIGURE 2-2 Examples of business casual attire.

Table 2-1 Business Casual Attire

Type of Clothing	Men	Women
Tops	Long-sleeved buttoned shirt	*Conservative blouses or sweaters
Bottoms	Khaki or dark-colored trousers	*Conservative skirts or trousers
Accessories	Tie (optional), belt, and dress shoes or loafers (no sneakers)	*Conservative heeled shoes or flats, minimal jewelry, conservative belts

*Note: Conservative means an appropriate length or cut. For women, clothing should not expose an inappropriate amount of cleavage or leg.

Accessories

In general, accessories such as earrings and other jewelry are not recommended in the hospital setting. If allowed, it is advisable that any necklaces or earrings be conservative in nature. Wedding bands are allowed, as are wristwatches. However, no jewelry of any kind is allowed in an IV room; this is to maintain sterility when preparing IV solutions.

TIPS AND TRICKS

The Value of Shoes

It has been said that a good pair of shoes can increase an average outfit's appearance; conversely, a bad pair of shoes can weaken an otherwise professional appearance. Whether interviewing for a position or working in the department, the effect of a good pair of shoes cannot be ignored. Comfortable shoes help reduce fatigue, which can increase performance and energy. Clean, well-kept shoes demonstrate an attention to detail that conveys professionalism. This does not mean that shoes have to be expensive, however. There are many places to get well-made and good-looking shoes at relatively inexpensive prices. Options include thrift stores, especially for dress shoes, and discount stores for sneakers. Brand-name footwear is not a requirement, as long as the shoes feel good and look presentable.

Grooming

The standard definition of **grooming** is to care for one's appearance. The term is commonly applied to general cleanliness habits. Attire can also fall under this category because it is part of overall appearance. Besides attire, grooming can be broken down into several areas.

Hair

This includes hair on the head and facial hair. Hair on the head must be kept cut according to the dress code of the facility. Unusual hair dye colors (blue, green, etc.) are not acceptable. Extreme hairstyles such as Mohawks are also typically not allowed. Facial hair must be kept trimmed and neat. Goatees, mustaches, and the like should not interfere with any sterility requirements for the facility.

Nails

Facility dress code will have specific requirements for nail length. No dirt should be visible under the nail. Artificial nails are *not* allowed for anyone performing IV compounding operations. The need for a pharmacy technician to make an IV can occur without warning, so it is not recommended in general to have artificial nails if you work in a hospital pharmacy in any capacity.

Facial and Ear Piercings

Most hospitals have a policy on the number of piercings an employee may have in each ear, usually no more than two per lobe for either gender. Small nose piercings may be acceptable in some locations, but other piercings on the face, such as eyebrows or labrets, are strongly discouraged. These types of piercings will have to be either removed before work or covered in some fashion.

Tattoos

Professional standards regarding tattoos are subjective. Dress codes dealing with tattoos will vary in different facilities, with some having no rules applying to them and others saying no visible tattoos are allowed. A safe stance regarding tattoos would be to have them in locations that can be hidden by clothing if necessary. Although tattoos in general have become more acceptable in mainstream culture, it does not mean that all supervisors or locations will allow them. Another perspective to consider is that of the patient. An elderly patient may have a more severe opinion of tattoos, which may impact their interactions with a technician who has them.

Smell

Personal hygiene is always a delicate subject. One of the most difficult conversations to have with an employee or coworker is regarding the presence of body odor. Showering at least once a day is recommended to avoid this potential for awkwardness. The daily use of deodorant should be a standard practice as well. Scents such as perfumes, colognes, or body sprays are to be used minimally, if at all. Coworkers and patients may be sensitive or allergic to these smells. Halitosis, or bad breath, can be mitigated by proper dental hygiene. Breath mints may help mask bad breath, but are not acceptable as an alternative to brushing regularly. It is important to note that an employee *may not be aware* of the fact that they have body odor, because their sense of smell can be desensitized to it.

Caring about one's appearance communicates to coworkers and supervisors a positive self-image and commitment to professionalism. This also communicates to patients of and visitors to the hospital a high level of competency from its employees. This can be viewed from another perspective as well. When buying a car, which car salesman would be more trusted to conduct an honest, fair deal with a customer: The clean-cut person with a wrinkle-free shirt, matching tie, and polished shoes, or the salesperson with body odor, messy hair, and bad breath? Although not 100% accurate, these stereotypes exist and are believed, and a professional hospital technician must be aware of these principles when going about their daily routines.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is a way of thinking or feeling that is usually reflected in a person's behavior. This is a constant aspect of our personality. From the moment a person wakes in the morning until they go to bed, their attitude is visible for everyone to see. This attitude can be positive or negative, and in many instances fluctuates throughout the day. A person's attitude can be influenced by many factors. Some are within the person's personal control, and some are not. Many times the term *attitude* is used negatively when speaking in everyday conversation. "That person has such an attitude!" Or, "Don't give me any attitude." The reason for such a negative perception is that the interactions people remember most clearly are generally the ones that are dramatic or negative.

It is possible to *project* a positive attitude, regardless of how one actually feels. This is a useful trait for a pharmacy technician. The first element in managing attitude is to understand and be consciously aware of the factors that affect it. The following categories are elements that can be controlled actively by any pharmacy technician.

Appearance

When you look good, it is easier to feel good. Rolling out of bed late and throwing on some clothes to get to work on time will look sloppy and make it harder to have a good attitude from the outset.

Time Management

In order to have time to prepare your appearance for work properly, effective time management is a necessity. When someone feels rushed, it immediately affects their mood. When someone has plenty of time to get ready, drive to work, or prepare for an interview, stress levels are lower and result in better performance.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are one of the most revealing aspects of a person's attitude at any given moment. They are also generally not thought about by a person at any given moment. One method to use facial expressions effectively is to practice smiling. If you have a negative attitude, it is hard to maintain it if you work at forcing yourself to smile. This has also been referred to in a common phrase: "Fake it till you make it." If a person already has a positive attitude, the conscious effort to smile should not be reduced, and will only serve to reinforce the current emotional state.

Perception

Overall, the state of a person's attitude largely depends on their perceptions. **Perception** is the recognition or appreciation of moral, psychological, or aesthetic qualities. Perceptions can be controlled and managed in part by what a person chooses to value. An example would be the difference between when someone wakes up and thinks, "I wish I didn't have to go to work today," versus, "I am glad I have a job to go to today." It depends on what the person *perceives* to be important.

MISTAKES TO LEARN FROM

When Facial Expressions Go Bad

Once I was talking with an employee about excessive use of profanity in the workplace. The employee was extremely defensive, and launched into a very well-worn argument that held little weight with me, because I had heard it many, many, many times before. As they started, I thought to myself, "And here we go again." What I was unaware of was that my eyes rolled, mirroring the thought as it was occurring (**Figure 2-3**). Although I was unaware of the physical action, I was very aware of its effect. The employee immediately shut down verbally and stormed out of the office. That situation could have been resolved to everyone's satisfaction much more easily if my facial reactions were more controlled. Poker players work on this concept constantly, resulting in the term *poker face*. This same type of interaction can also play out with coworkers, customers, and superiors. I have not rolled my eyes unconsciously since.



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FIGURE 2-3 Eye rolling does not foster feelings of goodwill.

A pharmacy technician's attitude is just as important as other factors in terms of success in the field. Receiving perfect scores in coursework, maintaining perfect attendance, and memorizing drug words do not, in and of themselves, guarantee a job. Conversely, a person who has a fantastic attitude but little retention of pharmacy practice knowledge would also have a questionable degree of success. Only the combination of both will allow pharmacy technicians to truly set themselves above the standard and achieve their career goals.

MINDSET

A person's mindset and attitude are very closely linked. A **mindset** is defined as "A fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations" (Mindset, 2000). After looking at the prior suggestions for how to manage attitude, a mindset can be considered an overall philosophy or theme that guides an attitude. It can be interpreted as a rulebook

for attitude control. As with any new set of rules, it takes practice to adhere to it regularly. The advantage is that these rules or philosophies can be used to work in many different environments successfully. The following sections describe several general mindsets to draw from. These definitions are grouped for organizational purposes based on similarities in concepts. Many of the actions that are initiated from these mindsets tend to overlap and encompass more than one style or type. There is no reason not to explore multiple mindsets, or utilize specific concepts from several.

The Humble Mindset

This is one of the most useful dispositions for both pharmacy technician students and new employees. The definition of **humbleness** is a “modest opinion or estimate of one’s own importance, rank, or the like” (Humility, n.d.). It is very easy, especially in today’s culture, to have a false sense of **entitlement**, or a claim to something. Note the use of the word *false*. The completion of a training program and attainment of licensure are not, in and of themselves, a reason to be awarded anything except a diploma and the opportunity to secure employment. Those milestones are merely the key that gets you in the door, where the real work begins.

By developing a humble mindset, the pharmacy technician subscribes to the belief that nothing is guaranteed, and the only way to receive certain outcomes in the field is to earn them through excellent performance. Higher compensation and preferred schedules are earned by hard work and reliability. This has also been referred to as putting in your dues. These behaviors will go far in generating goodwill between the pharmacy technician or student and pharmacy staff.

An application of the humble mindset is the following practice. It is hard not to respect someone who replies to your requests or inquiries with a “sir” or “ma’am.” These words can be an easy addition to one’s vocabulary. Humility is also necessary when asked to do different tasks. No task in a pharmacy is menial, but the humble mindset can help to ensure that concept is not forgotten. If one is asked to take out the trash, then take out the trash. It may not be medication order interpretation or dispensing, but it is a task that needs to be completed. The phrase or idea, “That’s not in my job description,” simply does not exist for someone who effectively has a humble mindset.

The Cheerleader Mindset

A cheerleader’s goal is to pump up a crowd during a sporting event. For pharmacy technicians, the cheerleader mentality is to always have high energy and a

positive attitude, and to try and create that feeling for others in the department. Asking how people are doing, encouraging high performance, and caring about the mood of the staff are activities that fall under this category.

The Hard Work Mindset

Pharmacy technicians who truly embody and believe in the hard work mindset are the star players of the team. They do not complain about the amount of work or variation in schedules that can occur. This mindset is seen in those who will work six double shifts in a row without grumbling, or pick up extra duties without even being asked when someone calls in sick. Many people say, “I am a hard worker,” in both interviews and on resumes, but only those who have the hard work mindset will demonstrate this trait in actual practice.

The Switzerland Mindset

When someone refers to himself or herself as “Switzerland,” he or she is usually referring to the fact that they are neutral in terms of conflict. This mindset is very useful when encountering differing opinions or methods in the department. The idea of departmental politics can be navigated easier using the Switzerland mentality. A pharmacy technician who utilizes this mindset will not take sides in a conflict, and will be able to work under many different types of pharmacist management styles. For example, a Switzerland technician can listen to gripes and complaints from multiple sides in the department, and each person will feel like the technician is not against them. The Switzerland technician, however, does not offer an opinion on these complaints; he or she only listens. Therefore they are not committing to one “side” or another verbally.

SUMMARY

The measure of hospital pharmacy technicians is not based solely on the amount of drug knowledge they possess, their appearance, or a winning personality. To have the highest chance of success, a pharmacy technician must employ all of these traits in *conjunction*. A successful pharmacy technician must maintain his or her appearance appropriately, practice proper grooming habits, and employ proper mindsets to get along in the department. These traits convey a high degree of professionalism, and are factored into the overall impressions of coworkers, supervisors, and patients in the facility.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Where can you find the dress code for a particular health system?
2. Describe typical appearance standards for a hospital pharmacy technician.
3. What are typical standards for piercings in a hospital setting?
4. List proper grooming standards for a professional technician.
5. Offensive body odor is a sensitive subject. What actions can help prevent this from being an issue?
6. How can a technician display a positive attitude while on the job?
7. Describe perception and how it can be used to affect attitude.
8. Compare and contrast different mindsets in regards to attitude. Which fall most in line with personal existing mindsets? How can this be used to display a professional attitude?

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