UCHealth Readies Uniform Scrubs Policy

By Erin Emery, UCH Health Insider South

Clinical employees across University of Colorado Health who currently wear scrubs will wear one of five scrub colors beginning this spring as part of a process developed to help patients and their families more clearly identify their UCHealth caregivers.

Across the nation, leading health care organizations are adopting uniform guidelines because they are considered a best practice and help improve patient satisfaction and patient safety.

“This makes it easier for patients to identify who their caregivers are,” said Bonnie Clipper, chief nursing officer for Medical Center of the Rockies. “When patients are in the hospital, they are nervous and stressed. When caregivers are not easily identifiable, it is confusing. Patients wonder ‘who’s who?’”

An estimated 8,200 of 15,000 UCHealth employees are affected by the new policy. Employees will receive an allocation from UCH to offset some of the cost of purchasing new scrubs. The dollar amounts will vary based on whether an employee is full-time, part-time or a flex employee. The exact amount of the allocation has not yet been determined.

Exact dates for roll-out of the new guidelines have not been finalized. University of Colorado Hospital, Medical Center of the Rockies and Poudre Valley Hospital will go live with the new look this spring, while Memorial Hospital will not roll out new uniforms until after July 1, the start of the 2015 fiscal year.

Colorful discussion. A task force with representatives from across the system has been meeting to discuss the new direction for UCHealth since June. The task force set up an online survey to ask employees to choose their colors. The colors selected by the employees are:

» Navy Blue — nurses, including RNs and LPNs
» Gray — clinical professionals, including pharmacy, respiratory therapists, technologists, and physician assistants
» Caribbean Blue — rehabilitation professionals, including PTs, OTs, speech therapists and rehab aides
» Wine — Clinical support, patient care techs, CNAs, nursing assistants, medical assistants, unit clerks, pharmacy techs, monitor techs, etc.
» Ceiling blue — Procedural and perioperative services employees

To maintain the professional look of the new scrubs, the new policy also allows employees the choice to wear solid white, gray or black shirts under their scrub tops. Under the new guidelines, hoodies, fleece vests/jackets or patterned T-shirts are not allowed.

Uniform approach. Historically, each hospital within the health system has had its own uniform policy. The new practice to align the look across the system is another example of UCHealth maturing as a health care system.

“It is all about keeping things simple and clear for our patients,” Clipper said.

Uniform tops will be embroidered with the University of Colorado Health name and logo. Some uniforms will be embroidered with specific titles; others will have department or service-type titles, all intended to improve the identification process for patients. The task...
force continues to work on standardizing the way titles will appear on uniforms across UCHealth.

From the patient’s point of view, three things help patients identify who is caring for them. The first – and most important - is a warm and friendly introduction.

“A really good introduction is key to patient satisfaction,” Clipper said. “Then there’s the ‘what we are wearing’ piece and the ID badge. It’s not like one of those pieces necessarily stands alone – it’s really those three pieces that go together that provide clarity for patients on who we are.”

Fade to black. The task force understands that standardizing dress across the system may upset some employees. Poudre Valley Hospital, Medical Center of the Rockies and Memorial Hospital employees will wear the same color of tops and bottoms. University of Colorado Hospital employees will continue to maintain their practice of wearing black scrub pants.

“Employees like their individual look, and while many of our employees already wear a structured scrub color, all of our employees across the system do not,” Clipper said. “We know that individuality is important to people, but we want employees to understand that this is really about the patient. This is a way for us to distinguish ourselves with a professional look, while improving our customer service and patient safety. Overall, better identification of caregivers will improve our care.

“Many places around the country have gone to this type of dress code, and feedback from patients has been very positive.”

Patient preference. Pat Johnson, clinical operations director for Memorial, said that when Memorial developed a uniform policy in 2005, research indicated a need for patient clarity.

“Memorial did research and found that patients had concerns about who was providing care. The research also showed that patients could not easily discern when a multitude of scrub colors were used. After an employee vote, Memorial ultimately selected colors that were vastly different from each other so patients could easily remember one color from another,” Johnson said.

Derek Rushing, vice president of clinical and support services for University of Colorado Hospital, said that standardizing uniforms helps improve patient safety.

“In urgent situations, it is very beneficial that other members of the hospital team are able to quickly identify, for instance, who in the room is the nurse. That speaks to internal quality and safety and, ultimately, that benefits the patient,” Rushing said.

Perfect fit. In January, the vendor will begin hosting “fit fairs” at various UCHealth locations. Employees will have the opportunity to try on uniforms for size and fit, so they will know which size to order online.

Once employees know their size, they may order their scrubs online. A link to the vendor will be posted on the hospital intranets. Employees will also be able access the company via the Internet.

“We are going to require these employees (except Memorial) to be in these scrubs by springtime, but how an employee chooses to spend that money will be their discretion. If they choose to buy long-sleeved instead of short sleeved, that’s their choice,” Rushing said.

If employees spend more than their allocation, the employee will be asked for a credit card number to cover the amount that exceeds the allocation. The vendor will also ask for mailing information. Scrubs should be sent to the employee’s home, or a location of their choice, but not to the workplace, Rushing said. Scrubs for UCHealth employees must be purchased through the selected vendor.

Procedural and perioperative employees will continue to access scrubs through their current processes.

Clipper, who has been at MCR for nine months, said that a similar program was implemented across St. David’s Health Care in Austin, Texas, where she used to work.

“It took employees a little while to get used to it because it feels more structured. It’s a uniform to some degree and in many cases you’re wearing something different than you’ve worn in the past,” Clipper said. “But once you get down the road a few months and look in your rearview mirror, you realize what a nice, clean, professional image your organization portrays, and you realize that your patients love it.”

More information will be provided after the task force finalizes details. In the meantime, please join the System
Scrubs/Uniform Yammer group to get updates. To do this go to https://www.yammer.com/uchealth.org/, search for the group titled “System Scrubs/Uniforms” and select it.