



## Letters to the Editor

### 'The Doctor Is In, but the Lab Coat Is Out'

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What a shame that not one physician cited in "The Doctor Is In, but the Lab Coat Is Out" [New York, October 9, 2006] seems to know that a health care worker's clothing can transmit dangerous bacteria from patient to patient. The purpose of a white, freshly laundered lab coat is not simply to impart authority to the doctor wearing it, but more importantly, to protect patients from these bacteria.

Ties and other garments are conveyor belts for infection. When a doctor leans over patients who have methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) on their skin - as some 2%-8% of patients do without knowing it - the doctor's clothing picks up these bacteria. The germ can last for days on fabric. Later, the doctor leans over another patient, depositing the germ and putting the patient at risk of developing a deadly infection.

Doctors may think that washing their hands and gloving is enough. But, if they scrub and glove, and then inadvertently touch their contaminated designer suit or tie, they've re-contaminated their hands before ever reaching the patient. The decline of the clean white coat is a sad symbol of the failure of some physicians to practice rigorous hygiene.

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