

White Coat

The End of a Generation?

Donning a white coat for the first time is often an unforgettable start to one's journey as a practitioner of the trade.



Dr Hardip Singh Gendeh
Member, MMA Wilayah
hardip88@hotmail.com

Co-authors
Dr Sanjiv Rampal
Life Member
MMA Wilayah

Datuk Dr Kuljit Singh
Life Member
MMA Wilayah

Nostalgia is one word that describes the white coat as it is the most recognisable garment that represents our noble profession. It is still vivid among many of us today who began our careers with the white coat. The white coat was simply meant to protect one's clothing beneath and act as a uniform. It was easy to clean and robust, easily withstanding repeated washing and external abuse of the clinical environment. It also had handy pockets for stationaries and one large enough for our extended ears, the stethoscope! Let's take a walk and reminisce about 'our' white coat.

Early Years

Prior to the 'White Coat' era, medical students and trainee doctors used to wear black lab coats during cadaveric dissection. Black coats were also popular in laboratories. The black coats were simply meant to respect the dead. It was only in the 1920s that the white coat became part of the doctor's uniform. In modern times, it symbolises the most distinctive uniform of practitioners and witnessing its popularity remains in the centre of our practice.

In came the 19th century and out went the art of mysticism in treating patients [1]. Doctors were seen as 'men or women of science', thus carrying the responsibility of a scientist with the emergence of research and subsequently, evidence-based medicine. Doctors became respected professionals. More doctors shifted their offices to the dungeons of the white-walled lab, looking for the power of medicine and a scientific explanation to the mysteries of the human body. Hence, what can better represent a scientist other than a white laboratory coat?

A Symbol of Sterility

The end of the 18th century saw the use of antiseptics to reduce surgical site infections. English surgeon Sir Joseph Lister who served at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary pioneered