

A Guide to Hijab in the Operating Room

Surgery, a field that is ever-evolving, has historically been male-dominated. Over the last decade, the number of female medical students and trainees has significantly increased, and now females make up the majority of medical students. However, the rate of females pursuing surgery and surgical sub-specialties has not followed the same trend.

Barriers



Minorities and females are substantially underrepresented in orthopedics, otolaryngology, and neurosurgery, along with other surgical specialties. It is imperative to address the disconnect and to identify ways to increase the diversity of surgical specialties. Pipeline programs and societies such as *Nth Dimensions* and *Ruth Jackson Orthopedic Society* offer initiatives and strategies to increase the exposure of women and minorities in surgical subspecialties. Nonetheless, barriers still exist that prevent certain minorities from entering these fields.

Specifically, hijab-wearing Muslim women have a difficult time finding a balance between donning compliant religious attire and maintaining modesty while also complying with hospital and operating room regulations.

Research

To address these barriers to surgery, research was conducted of all the ACGME-accredited residency programs in Neurological Surgery, Orthopedic Surgery, and General Surgery in the United States listed on the AAMC website. Based on review of resident pictures, 9 hijab wearing women were identified out of 9,673 residents (0.9%). The American College of Surgeons (ACS) was contacted and asked about hijab-wearing women who are members of ACS, of whom 1 was identified. A literature review was conducted across different countries and hospital cultures to determine possible solutions and accommodations for hijab in the OR.

Possible Solutions



Based on the alternatives for hospital personnel in other parts of the world, and based on what is available from companies that supply clothing for the operating room, there are options easily available to maintain both the modesty preferred by the women as well as the sterility required in the operating room. Hijabs can be covered with surgical hoods to remain completely covered while in the OR. Additionally, long sleeve scrub jackets can be worn over scrubs until just prior to scrubbing in. The arms are then covered again once the surgeon dons their sterile gown.

To minimize barriers for these women entering the OR, the OR administration and leadership should ensure easily accessible hoods as well as long sleeve jackets to hijab-wearing women entering the OR. Women's locker rooms should be stocked with the full scrub hood, as should entry ways traditionally stocked with bouffants. Scrub jackets should also be readily available through whichever dispensing device is used within the hospital, so that arms can remain fully covered until removed for scrubbing.

Lastly, encouraging hijab-wearing women to indicate on intake forms and in new-hire contracts that they will need long sleeve scrub jackets along with surgical hoods for proper OR attire is recommended.

By removing the barriers and hindrances that have prevented hijab-wearing Muslim women from entering surgical fields, a new subset of talent can pursue surgical careers and help contribute to the evolution of the field of surgery. A collection of education materials has been created in efforts to address and remove these barriers, including a video on how to scrub in wearing hijab as well as a detailed plan on how to request and implement accommodations at medical schools and institutions around the United States.

This was prepared by Deena Kishawi, Dr Hina Faisal, and Dr Sasha Adams. Deena is a medical student at Loyola University in Chicago, planning to pursue a career in orthopedic surgery. Hina Faisal is an anesthesia fellow at McGovern Medical School UTHealth, who also completed a year of surgery prior to entering anesthesia residency. Both women wear a hijab and cover their arms and have found ways to minimize barriers to maintaining the modesty of their religious beliefs while respecting the sterility requirements of the OR.

Additional information available at www.HijabInTheOR.com – website created by Ms Kishawi