Professionalism

A Piercing Dilemma

While interviewing for a junior faculty position at a very prestigious academic medical center, I attended morning report. I do not remember the clinical case, but the female chief resident who was leading the report made a lasting impression. She was wearing pants and a short top that allowed a belly button ring to be prominently displayed. Maybe management of the case had been superb and the discussion, sublime, but I could not concentrate and began to doubt the caliber of the program. I imagined what kind of trainees would have such little respect for their patients and what kind of faculty (would-be colleagues) would not admonish such attire? Is not the doubt that I felt the same doubt that patients feel when they encounter a health care provider with unprofessional grooming or attire?

While I do not personally have piercings other than in my ears, I do understand there are many who do. Maybe I am old fashioned, but I think the dress and appearance of health care providers should demonstrate professionalism and support a serious and sacred pact with our patients. By dressing and appearing professionally, we validate the significance of the relationship, acknowledging that we are not their barista, but a person to whom the patient entrusts their most private thoughts and concerns.

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