

WHAT NOT WEAR

DON'T WEAR THAT

DON'T MAKE IT A STAPH-OSCOPE

If you're not disinfecting that stethoscope between patients, consider not using it.

WATCH IT

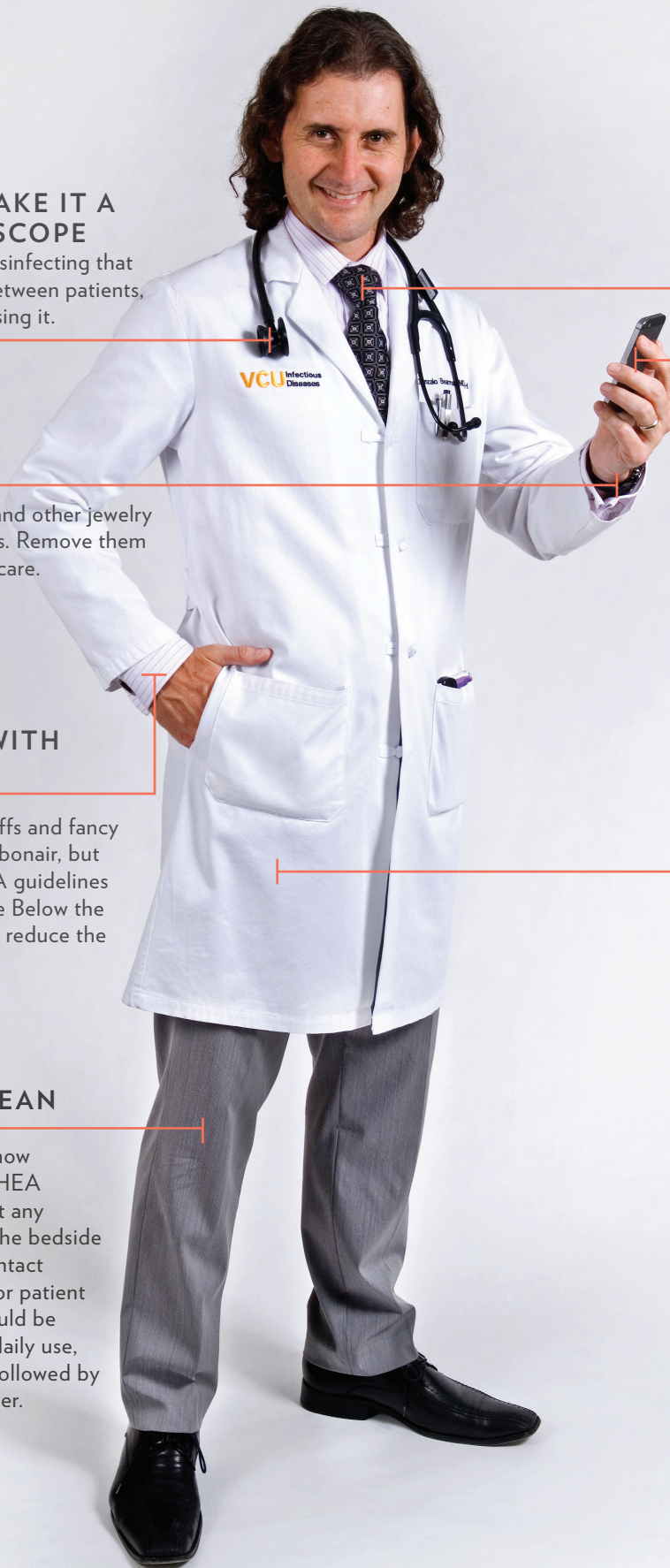
Your wristwatch and other jewelry can harbor germs. Remove them during inpatient care.

ENOUGH WITH THE CUFF

Those French cuffs and fancy cufflinks look debonair, but Bearman's SHEA guidelines recommend Bare Below the Elbows (BBE) to reduce the spread of germs.

KEEP IT CLEAN

Think you know how to do laundry? SHEA recommends that any apparel worn at the bedside that comes in contact with the patient or patient environment should be laundered after daily use, using hot water followed by a cycle in the dryer.



DON'T BE TIED DOWN

When was the last time you cleaned your necktie? You probably don't want to know what's growing there. If you must wear a tie, be sure that it is either tucked in or fastened so that it won't come in direct contact with the patient or patient care environment.

GERM MAGNETS

The healthcare environment is teeming with pathogens. Where's your cell phone been?

FREE YOUR FOREARMS

Bare Below the Elbows (BBE) makes hand hygiene to the levels of the wrists and forearms easier and reduces the risk of spreading pathogens in the hospital.

TAKE IT OFF

SHEA suggests removing the infrequently laundered white coat during patient visits to reduce the spread of germs from direct patient contact with the apparel.

WHITE WASH

According to SHEA, facilities that mandate or strongly recommend use of a white coat for professional appearance should institute one or more of the following measures:

Providers should have two or more white coats available and have access to a convenient and economical means to launder white coats (such as on-site laundering at no cost or low cost).

Institutions should provide coat hooks that would allow providers to remove their white coat prior to contact with patients or a patient's immediate environment.

WEAR THIS



BADGE OF DISTINCTION

Patients like providers to be easily recognizable, but that doesn't have to mean a white coat. Name badges that include your title in large letters make it easy for patients to know who you are.

VEST DRESSED

Bearman and colleagues at the VCU Medical Center often wear sleeveless vests in lieu of white coats. The vests feature many convenient pockets, and as they are sleeveless, they allow for a BBE approach to inpatient care. Also, they look uniform-like and professional. The concept, says Bearman, is gaining traction quickly.

START AT THE BOTTOM

Footwear should always have closed toes, low heels, and be non-slip and puncture-resistant.

Hippocrates had a definite idea of what physicians should be — “clean in person, well dressed, and anointed with sweet-smelling unguents.”

For generations, that's been business attire topped off with a white coat and maybe a few squirts of sweet-smelling hand sanitizer.

Gonzalo Bearman, M.D., M.P.H., associate hospital epidemiologist and professor of medicine at the VCU Medical Center, says that traditional physician dress may play a role in transmission of pathogens in the inpatient setting.

Bearman was lead author of an expert guidance paper published earlier this year by the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA), a professional group whose mission is to prevent and control infections in the medical workplace. In the paper, he talks about the bacteria that can live on clothing, jewelry and everyday objects. These objects are not washed or decontaminated between patient encounters and may serve as vectors of transmission. His work and SHEA's guidelines for provider clothing have been cited in publications such as *The New York Times* and *USA Today*.

Bearman stresses that SHEA's guidance statement on health care professional attire is for the acute-care or inpatient setting, not necessarily for physicians in lower-risk, ambulatory settings.

And while there's no concrete proof that losing the white coat will result in increased patient safety, it's part of myriad measures hospitals are taking to minimize germs.

So consider hanging up the white coat and rolling up your sleeves next time you take care of a hospitalized patient. “It's just common sense,” says Bearman. — Lisa Crutchfield