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# Identification badges: a guide for the foundation year doctor

## Introduction

In the interests of security, there is a requirement for suitable identification (ID) of people in a hospital. Anyone on site is assumed, perhaps misguidedly, to be a genuine worker (including contractors), patient or visitor. Obviously, visitors and outpatients will not have ID, but other people should. Inpatients are issued with wrist-bands and staff with badges.

Traditional medical trappings of a white coat, and even a stethoscope round the neck, may no longer be feasible because of custom and practice as well as infection control. In any case, any imposter can buy and don convincing attire.

## ID issues

On NHS premises, all staff should carry or wear photographic ID badges and be prepared to show them on request. The days of 'Do you not know who I am?' are gone. Do not be offended if someone asks to see your badge. Depending on its location, the other person may be unable to see or read it easily, or may not want to offend you by peering too closely at certain parts of your body. However, if you feel that your personal safety is compromised, perhaps by a relative's threatening manner and demands to know who you are, you should remove yourself from the situation if possible and bring the issue to the attention of an appropriate member of staff such as your consultant, the nurse in charge of the ward, a manager or a member of human resources staff.

Trusts used to produce pin-on badges with the doctor's name and job title, but no photograph. With current scrutiny and accountability, this is no longer adequate. Anyone can use someone else's badge, particularly if there is only an initial on it rather than a first name. A sophisticated bogus could even have one made. There is nothing to stop you wear-

ing such an item (unless there are infection control restrictions), but you need photographic ID as well.

Medical human resources will normally arrange for you to be supplied with an ID badge at induction or shortly afterwards. You will probably have to visit the relevant department and present an authorization form. A photograph will be taken and put straight onto the computer. You can ask to see the photo and have it repeated if you are not happy with it. If you change your badge, you can ask for the same photo to be used from last time. The badge may have an expiry date as you are on a fixed-term contract.

Some trusts are no longer allowing the use of the title 'Dr'. One argument is on alphabetical grounds, as all doctors would apparently be listed under D in the database. Many trusts will also compel you to display your full first name rather than just an initial. Speak to medical human resources if you are concerned about this. If you have any choice over the wording of your job title, choose one that describes your role appropriately without confusing patients, as many patients will not be aware of the level at which a foundation doctor works.

The badge may be supplied on a clasp or chain, depending on infection and safety guidelines. It may be inside a holder, or a hole may be punched into the card itself for the attachment. A badge can dangle onto a patient. For this reason, some doctors tuck their badges into top pockets while performing examinations or procedures. However, if they leave them in there afterwards, they are not readily identifiable. There is potential for strangulation with a neck-chain, hence many lanyards have a quick-release mechanism.

The badge may be combined with other facilities such as entry swipe-cards or car-park cards. If separate, they may be on an extendable cord for ease of use. You may need to show your badge at a camera to gain entry to restricted areas, such as obstetrics or paediatrics, if you have not had access granted.

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You can be disciplined for not carrying your badge. This sounds paradoxical, if people do not know who you are, but there are ways and means of finding out. Check your trust's policies and make sure you adhere to them. Ask medical human resources if you are unsure.

Do not wear your badge outside the workplace, as this is potentially risky. If you live on site, it is advisable to keep it in your possession even when off duty, in case you are asked to show it.

Some trusts give a discount in the canteen for staff showing ID badges, which is a good incentive for those who buy their food that way. ID may also allow free shut-

tle bus travel between different sites within the same trust.

You should look after your badge. If you lose it and need a replacement, you may be charged. There is also a security risk if someone who looks even vaguely like you picks it up. You should hand it back when you leave the trust.

### Conclusions

You should always carry or wear your ID badge and be prepared to show it on request, unless you feel threatened. Guard it as you would your credit cards. Familiarize yourself with and abide by your trust's policies regarding its use. [BJHM](#)

*Conflict of interest: Dr Hooke has worked in both management and medicine. Her views are her own and do not necessarily reflect those of her employer or any other organization that she is associated with.*

### KEY POINTS

- Always carry or wear identification in hospital.
- Be prepared to show your identification on request.
- If you feel unsafe, walk away and alert a member of staff.
- Check and adhere to your trust's policies.
- Do not lose your badge.