

'Why does it have to be open at the back?' The impact of the hospital gown on recovery and wellbeing

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If you are what you wear what impact does wearing a backless hospital gown have on health, wellbeing and recovery? Research has yet to explore this and there seems to be institutionalised acceptance of the gown despite recent drives to empower patients with person centred health care provisions. We report on two small scale studies which were carried out to consider the impact of the hospital gown on wellbeing and recovery among adults with and without chronic health conditions.

The first study consisted of conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n = 10) with adults living with a life-long chronic health conditions (congenital heart disease), which were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematic analysis was used to identify themes from the qualitative data. The second study is a cross-sectional, online survey exploring adults' views (n = 600+) and experiences of the hospital gown. Preliminary qualitative analysis has identified the following master themes: (1) loss of 'healthy' identity, (2) symbolic embodiment of the 'sick' role, (3) relinquishing control to medical professionals, and (4) vulnerability, disempowerment and embarrassment.

Preliminary quantitative analysis of the online survey data indicates that adults often reported wearing the hospital gown despite lack of medical necessity with its design considered to be not fit for purpose and lacking in dignity. The implications of these findings are discussed, emphasising the importance of challenging cultural norms in healthcare since de-humanising aspects of care may contribute adversely impact wellbeing and recovery.