

“Can a Doctor Have a Pink Mohawk?”***Kendra Leigh Campbell****Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, Brooklyn - NY, USA*

You're sitting in the examining room, anxiously awaiting your doctor, wondering if she'll be able to provide some relief to what ails you. Then she walks through the door. She's not wearing a white coat, but instead is casually dressed and her hair is cut into a bright pink mohawk. Your jaw drops to the floor in disbelief. Certainly she's not the doctor -- maybe she's a tech or a nurse. But then she introduces herself. "Hello, I'm Dr. Kendra Campbell, how can I help you today?" How would you react? Would you be astonished? Would you be angry or upset? Would you refuse to be seen by such a doctor? Or would you give her a chance?

According to a study ([link: http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/331/7531/1524](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/331/7531/1524)) published in the British Medical Journal, your reaction probably depends on your age and on whether or not the doctor was smiling. The authors of this study showed patients pictures of doctors in various styles of dress, ranging from the very formal white coat to informal jeans and short skirts. They also showed pictures of doctors with less conservative appearances, such as women with brightly colored hair and men with earrings. What I found interesting was that the patient's age seemed to have an important correlation with what they found acceptable in a doctor. Older patients were much less accepting of less conservative attire, whereas younger patients seemed to prefer the less formal and less conservative dress.

As someone with brightly colored hair, this is obviously fascinating to me. I've managed to get away with it thus far in my career, working at various hospitals and at the AAMC (and I can tell you that I was the only one with such hair at every place I've worked). But what happens when I start my clinical rotations or my residency, and when I'm finally in practice? Surely, people will expect me to conform to some standards.

Up to now, I've received mixed responses to my hair, but by far, most of them have been positive. The initial reaction seems to be shock, and then maybe a bit of suspicion. Can a girl with a pink mohawk be a good doctor? Is she a delinquent? Maybe a democrat? But after a few minutes of talking with me, most people seem to forget about the color of my hair and instead focus on who I am. I think that I'm a pretty nice person, and most people seem to agree. I certainly hope to be an outstanding doctor someday. More than one person has told me that they were taken back by my hair at first, but then pleasantly surprised after getting to know me. I've even been encouraged by more than one very conservative person to "keep the hair." It is definitely a part of who I am.

The other really fascinating finding of the BMJ study is that no matter what the doctor was wearing, if they were smiling, most patients found this very appealing. This opens up a whole new can of worms. Any psychologist, or person for that matter, can tell you that a smile can go a long way. Perhaps this is how I've gotten away with my crazy hair for so long. I am a smile-a-holic. I am one of those annoying people who seem to be smiling all day long. Goofy smiles, toothy smiles, sushi hanging out of my mouth smiles, you name it -- I'm probably sporting it. Maybe that's been my saving grace. But I wonder if the person who interviews me for a residency position will feel the same way if I show up for my interview with a pink mohawk and a huge smile. I'd love to hear what you think.