



Royal College  
of Surgeons  
of England

ADVANCING SURGICAL CARE



## Welcome to your new theatre hat!

Hello!

Thank you for being part of this project. #TheatreCapChallenge. The Medical Women's Federation (MWF) is the largest organisation of women doctors and medical students in the UK. We were successful in a bid for funding from the Royal College of Surgeons of England's "Grassroots" fund. This aims to increase the numbers of people from underrepresented groups becoming surgeons. The Centre for Perioperative Care (CPOC) has also contributed. MWF is coordinating the distribution of individual named cloth theatre hats to medical students who are women or non-binary. There are three options: standard, hijab and Afro or large hair hats. These will help medical students to be more included within the surgical team and to learn and feel they belong. Cloth theatre hats also more sustainable and part of the Green surgery checklist.

### 1. Please be proud of yourself and the project!

Please talk about it, send us pictures and tag us on social media @medicalwomenuk

### 2. Laundering and infection control:

NHS uniform policies usually state that you should wear a clean uniform every shift. You are therefore expected to clean your hat every shift and to change it if it is visibly soiled. During this trial, we are only giving one hat per student. Some practicalities need to be considered when going on placement:

- *Washing:*
  - *it can go in an ordinary wash*
  - *it can be washed by hand and dried overnight. For example, take a bag of detergent with you to a surgical placement and have a dry towel ready. Wash the hat in warm water with detergent, soap or washing up liquid. Agitating it is useful. Soaking for a few minutes can be helpful. Rinse well in clean water. To dry, squeeze out excess water and then roll it in a dry towel twice. Hang it in air to dry, or over a radiator, or tumble dry.*
- *Drying on a washing line and/or ironing reduces microbial contamination. Over a radiator is fine. Tumble-drying also reduces microbial contamination, but is less good for the environment.*
- *Information on laundering specific to the #TheatreCapChallenge from the University of West London advisor to the Sustainability team at the Royal College of Surgeons of England:*
  - *"There is no need to use particularly hot water, the key to removing contamination is to wash in detergent and plenty of warm water (from the hot tap is fine). Dilution is the key! Drying is helpful in eliminating any remaining bacteria – it is the drying out that is important, not how it is done. Whilst there are concerns about adding tumble drying, given the restriction on hat numbers for the trial, I would let them tumble dry them. Hanging over a radiator is fine too. It should be remembered that a hat is just like any other item of clothing and is only there to prevent hair falling into the surgical site or sterile field. I very much doubt the need for it to be freshly washed every day but should definitely be washed if it becomes contaminated with blood/body fluid."*

### 3. Recycling:

Please return your hat to us when it is no longer in use, Alternatively, let us know when you qualify as a doctor and want a new label, or a ribbon embroidered with "Doctor" to sew over embroidery instead of "medical student". We can also try to help with changing the personalisation if you are giving it to someone else. Contact details below!

## MEDICAL WOMEN'S FEDERATION

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email: [admin.mwf@btconnect.com](mailto:admin.mwf@btconnect.com) website: [www.medicalwomensfederation.org.uk](http://www.medicalwomensfederation.org.uk)



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### Further information – please be aware of this because you may be asked to explain it

Many women medical students report being put off surgery[1]. Intersectionality means that experiences are worse for example for women from a minority ethnic background. They are still passively[2] or actively discouraged, even in 2025. The Kennedy report showed poor behaviours in theatre. The Working Party on Sexual misconduct in surgery showed that some places have a misogynistic culture. In one survey, 51.5% of women who wear a hijab reported feeling awkward, embarrassed or bullied in the operating theatre and avoiding operating theatres and a surgical career[3]. Women medical students with Afro hair report difficulties with surgical caps making surgical placements unpleasant – as this blog from the founder of Melanin Medics shows[4]. Medical schools vary widely in the proportion of women graduates who later apply to surgery ranging from 3% to 13% [5] and we have shown this is related to different cultures[6] and that a pleasant interactive experience makes medical students feel that they belong[7]. Women are more likely to leave surgical training due to negative experiences[8].

The #TheatreCapChallenge has reusable cloth hats. It developed across the world since 2014. It has been endorsed by all UK surgical royal colleges in the 'Intercollegiate Green Surgery checklist' [9] as 'item 7: switch to reusable textiles - theatre hats'. Where the hat states the person's name and role, they are recognised as part of the team[10].

This project should have a lasting impact. It should normalise having women medical students within the surgical team, especially those who wear a hijab or have Afro hair. It demonstrates that the Royal College of Surgeons of England values each medical student. This should improve belonging and inclusion as well as demonstrating Equality and Diversity. It is literally "in your face" advertising of the new normal. This works in practice[11]. Universities or other organisations may wish to continue the project with charity or institutional funds. Companies would identify the need for hijab and Afro hair versions and create more affordable items for others to purchase in future.

1. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10094657/>
2. <https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/doi/abs/10.12968/bjhc.2017.23.12.581>
3. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/3/e019954>
4. <https://gmcuk.wordpress.com/2021/04/27/the-scrub-cap-awareness-is-the-first-step/>
5. <https://publishing.rcseng.ac.uk/doi/10.1308/rcsbull.2018.90>
6. <https://publishing.rcseng.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1308/rcsbull.2020.e009>
7. <https://publishing.rcseng.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1308/rcsbull.2017.320>
8. <https://asmepublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/medu.12134>
9. <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/-/media/images/rcs/about-rcs/sustainability/greentheatrecompendiumofevidence.pdf>
10. [https://www.bjanaesthesia.org/article/S0007-0912\(18\)30585-3/fulltext](https://www.bjanaesthesia.org/article/S0007-0912(18)30585-3/fulltext)
11. <https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/211889783/Rodgers-etal-DESIGN-2024-Co-designing-for-the-nhs-the-development-of-sustainable.pdf>

### Information about the organisations with initials on the theatre hats – and how to join us, please:

The **Medical Women's Federation** is the largest organisation of women doctors and medical students in the UK. Medical student subscriptions are £5 per year: [www.medicalwomensfederation.org.uk](http://www.medicalwomensfederation.org.uk)

The **Royal College of Surgeons of England** provides world-class education, assessment and development to 30,000 surgeons and others at all career stages. Its vision is excellent surgical care for everyone, through setting professional standards, facilitating research and championing the best outcomes for patients. Join Women in Surgery (WinS) FREE <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/careers-in-surgery/women-in-surgery/>. See "Learning in operating theatres", "National Undergraduate Surgical Curriculum" and how to join as an affiliate for £15 per year at: [www.rcseng.ac.uk/study](http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/study)

The **Centre for Perioperative Care** is a cross-organisational, multidisciplinary initiative led by the Royal College of Anaesthetists to improve perioperative care - from the moment surgery is contemplated through to full recovery. See resources and sign up for FREE newsletters at: [www.cpoc.org.uk](http://www.cpoc.org.uk)