

Consultants

Guidance on supporting professional activities

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This guidance suggests some parameters for assessing the time required to undertake supporting professional activities.

Introduction

Supporting Professional Activities (SPAs) are defined in the Terms and Conditions, Consultants (England) 2003 as “activities that underpin direct clinical care. This may include participation in training, medical education, continuing professional development, formal teaching, audit, job planning, appraisal, research, clinical management and local clinical governance activities.”

The 2003 consultant contract states that the Job Plan should consist of ten Programmed Activities (PAs) for a full-time consultant and should typically include an average of 7.5 PAs for direct clinical care and 2.5 PAs for SPAs. The precise arrangements will need to be determined locally and it may be helpful to use a local framework for considering how much time should be spent on the different constituents that may comprise SPAs. Furthermore, in some cases no outcomes or objectives for these activities are being agreed. Given that the 'typical average' allocation constitutes 25 per cent of the time for which individual consultants might be employed; this is a potentially significant omission.

There is, however, a range of imperatives for consultants that require time to be set aside by agreement with employers for them to meet a number of requirements, e.g. a need to maintain accreditation and revalidation through appraisal and continuing medical education (CME). Most medical royal colleges have set out the requirements and the number of hours reasonably required annually for CME, which form part of the assessment for revalidation. Employers will wish to ensure that job plans reflect the requirement placed upon consultants to obtain and maintain accreditation.

In order for NHS organisations to attract medical staff, both non-training and training grades, a culture of education and training needs to be further developed within the NHS. To ignore this would have a detrimental effect on recruitment, retention and return. However, this does not mean that all consultants need necessarily be involved in all of these activities. The flexibility inherent in the contract would provide for the number of SPA PAs required to deliver agreed activities in a given department to be determined and allotted to those undertaking the work. For example, in locations where undergraduate teaching takes place, a specified amount of time may be allocated to meet teaching needs and associated requirements. A number of activities, such as appraisal and job planning, whilst important, are ordinarily expected to require only require a short period of time annually.

Suggested framework

NHS organisations could agree with consultants locally:

- the time required to fulfil agreed activities and
- the outcomes expected from that allocation.

Such activities could include (this list is not exhaustive):

- CPD/Audit/Personal CME
- clinical management
- clinical governance activity
- teaching and training.

Employers will wish to ensure that consultants have a sufficient allocation of SPA PAs to support and, where appropriate, enhance the range and quality of work undertaken during direct clinical care PAs.

Medical education

The amount of time required to undertake this by consultants within a department could be assessed and the activity, in the form of SPA PAs, allotted to the teachers. Consideration could be given to the appropriateness of replacing PAs previously designated for other duties with specified time for educational activities.

Research

Not all consultants undertake research, nor it is limited to clinical academics. Research can be assessed on an individual basis and the outputs measured by, for example, papers published and/or presentations at meetings (regional/national/international). Audit and research should not be confused.

Medical management

Time spent on management activity could be recognised in a number of ways, replacing PAs for direct clinical care or SPAs or recognising it by methods of reward as provided for by the contract.

This brief guide suggests some parameters for assessing the time required to undertake supporting professional activities and is not wholly inclusive of all activities undertaken by consultants, particularly in relation to external work, such as medical royal college work for which there can be recognition via special leave, professional leave or external duty PAs.

Notes

Please note that guidance is not wholly inclusive of all activities undertaken by consultants, particularly in relation to external work, such as medical royal college work for which there can be recognition via special leave, professional leave or external duty programmed activities.

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