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CONSULTANT JOB PLANNING – SUPPORTING GOOD PRACTICE

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN PREPARING FOR THE JOB PLANNING DISCUSSION

Introduction

In 2001 NHS Employers and the British Medical Association (BMA) published *A guide to consultant job planning*. The document set out a shared understanding of the key principles that should characterise a collaborative approach to the job planning process. It highlighted the benefits of effective preparation for both managers and consultants and the importance of agreeing SMART objectives. It also provided a basis for an effective and mutually beneficial means of meeting the challenges that consultants and managers currently face in delivering high quality care.

A version of this guidance aimed at specialty and associate specialist (SAS) doctors was published in 2012 and the principles set out below apply equally to these doctors.

Following publication of the guidance, both NHS Employers and the BMA agreed to continue to work together to support the development of high quality job planning.

This document outlines a number of areas that both consultants and managers will need to take into account in preparing for the job plan discussion, and agreeing the contents of the job plan. It also offers possible solutions to some common problems.

Team-based job planning

A consultant job plan should be a prospective agreement that sets out a consultant's duties, responsibilities and objectives for the coming year. Job plans should set out agreed personal objectives and their relationship with the employing organisation's wider service objectives. Teams should meet beforehand so that:

- job plans flow naturally from organisational and team objectives
- job plans are not drawn up in isolation.

Discussions should cover:

- what the service will do
- the commissioning and contracting environment for the coming year and beyond
- reflections on the previous year – what went well and areas for improvement across the organisation/directorate/team
- actions and resources needed to improve quality and delivery
- areas of strengths and weakness
- identifying priorities and shared objectives
- clinical governance requirements
- education, training and research
- improving data in setting objectives and job plans.

The team job planning meeting can also cover:

- distribution of on-call and emergency work
- leave
- allocation of extra programmed activities
- external duties
- annualisation.

Objective setting

Strong objective setting is the foundation of an effective job plan. Objectives should be appropriate, identified and agreed:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable and agreed
- Relevant
- Timed and tracked.

All objectives are personal and there should be a balance of service objectives linked to trust objectives and personal development objectives. These may be a combination of:

- hard objectives (eg four-hour wait)
- soft objectives (greater involvement of patients)
- personal development objectives (gain appropriate certification)
- team objectives (individual contribution to team performance)
- performance standards.

The objective setting discussion should cover:

- team objectives
- additional responsibilities
- clinical governance and quality issues
- service requirements
- personal development plan (as the result of appraisal).

The outcomes of that discussion will be:

- agreed objectives, including an agreed and supported personal development plan (PDP)
- agreed support requirements
- an agreed process for review of objectives.

Supporting resources

The same objective setting process should be applied equally to supporting professional activities (SPAs). Investment in productive SPA time can benefit individuals, organisations, the wider NHS and, of course, patients. A team approach to agreeing SPAs is just as valid. This can include:

- training
- medical education
- CPD
- teaching
- audit
- research
- job planning
- appraisal
- clinical governance.

Other supporting resources which might be discussed can include:

- workspace and IT access
- the medical staff team
- secretarial/PA support
- mandatory training opportunities
- time for external duties
- access to data
- audit/governance support
- remote access to services
- theatre access.

Annualised job plans

Consultants and managers may agree arrangements for the annualisation of programmed activities or other arrangements for flexible scheduling over an agreed period of time. A degree of flexibility is essential for good professional performance. An annualised job plan is essentially a determination of the total number of PAs to be carried out over the year, but not necessarily delivered in the same number each week. An annualised job plan may be useful where:

- there is as variable work pattern
- family commitments exist (term-time working)
- there is seasonal variation in workload.

Annualised job plans should be subject to regular review.

Review

Performance should be reviewed so that progress towards meeting objectives can be monitored and additional support given where appropriate. Good principles for performance monitoring process are that:

- it happens quickly
- it is accurate
- it is straightforward to collect and collate information
- it is owned by those involved
- it is easy to use.

Dealing with problems

Agreeing a job plan is a very personal process and there will inevitably be occasions when managers and consultants are unable to agree on all aspects of the job plan. Some difficulties can be avoided through:

- offering strong organisational support
- effective preparation by both parties
- sharing information in advance
- team job planning
- starting with objectives and not the timetable
- avoiding other issues
- being prepared to compromise.



Common problems and possible solutions

1. Previous rounds of job planning have failed to address issues

Acknowledge that there has been a previous failure to resolve these issues. Commit to an honest process this time and agree on steps to resolve the outstanding issues.

2. Objectives are unaligned – the manager and the consultant have competing objectives

Secure organisational commitment to proper job planning and share information well in advance so that potential problems are identified early in the process.

3. There is a perception that an individual's job plan is not consistent with others in the unit

Ensure that comparisons are valid and any differences justifiable. This could be addressed through team job planning.

4. One of the parties wants to raise another issue not directly related to the job plan

This could be a symptom that other means of communication have failed. Arrange a separate approach to resolving this issue so that the job planning meeting can continue without distraction.

5. It is proving difficult to arrange meetings and get sign-off of job plans

It might be that the organisation needs to signal its commitment to job planning. A written approach may be required and consultants reminded of the possible consequences for pay progression.

6. There seems to be a lack of progress on quality improvement

This could be that objectives have not been set appropriately or are not SMART or that there is a lack of supporting resource. An interim review might help to identify problems.

7. The job planning meeting seems to be going round in circles

Both parties need to ensure that they understand each other's position and consider where a compromise would help meet both sides' aims. Failing that mediation might help.

For more information about job planning, see NHS Employers' [job planning web pages](#) or email doctorsanddentists@nhsemployers.org

NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:

- pay and negotiations
- recruitment and planning the workforce
- healthy and productive workplaces
- employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

Contact us

For more information on how to get involved in our work,
email getinvolved@nhsemployers.org
www.nhsemployers.org
enquiries@nhsemployers.org

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 [NHS Employers](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nhs-employers)

 www.youtube.com/nhsemployers

NHS Employers
2 Brewery Wharf
Kendell Street
Leeds LS10 1JR

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publications@nhsconfed.org

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