**Supporting Professional Activities (SPAs)**

**Policy Statement**

**Medical and Dental Professionalism**

Medical and Dental professionalism signifies a set of values, behaviours and relationships that underpins the trust the public has in NHS Consultants. Acting professionally embraces the achievement of the highest clinical standards, respect for the interests of individual patients and engagement with the development and improvement of health services. It is these values that lie at the heart of being a good NHS consultant and we accept that NHS consultants have a responsibility to act according to these values. Equally, other members of the healthcare team, e.g. managers, have a reciprocal duty to help create an organisational infrastructure to support NHS consultants in the exercise of their professional responsibilities. SPA time is part of that organisational infrastructure and provides time in job plans to help individual NHS consultants to monitor, maintain and improve their own standards of practice which is crucial in the long-term maintenance of the quality of the service.

It is during the time made available through SPAs that consultants are able to undertake training and education, continuing professional development (CPD), research, audit, appraisal, and help develop new techniques and services. The expectations on those undertaking educational roles have increased significantly in the last few years and this again takes time made available through SPA time.

Activity carried out in SPA time will enable consultant staff to comply with future revalidation processes with statutory bodies (GMC and GDC) so ensuring the legal right to practise.

**The Consultant Contract**

The 2003 consultant contract defined categories of programmed activities (PAs) within the contract. These included: direct clinical care, supporting professional activities (SPAs) and additional NHS duties and external duties. Within a full-time framework of 10 PAs, the contract stated that a full-time consultant would normally devote on average 7.5 PAs per week to direct clinical care and 2.5 to SPAs.

This is the position on the 2003 contract and does not take regional variations into account.

**College and Faculty Position**

The College and Faculty have no part in the negotiation of terms and conditions of employment for NHS consultants. It exists to set and maintain standards of dental care. We strongly support the value of SPAs to ensure consultants have time to develop and maintain their skills, train and nurture the future generation of dental surgeons and help drive the future direction of dental surgery through audit and research. We consider it vital that these activities, core to the character of dental practice, are recognised and preserved.

**New Posts**

As part of our commitment to maintaining standards, our Regional Advisors, Specialty Advisors and Regional Specialty Professional Advisors (RSPA’s) approve job descriptions and job plans for advertised consultant posts. The role of these advisors is to ensure that the post contains an appropriate balance of clinical, academic, research and managerial activities whilst allowing time for teaching and training. In doing so, they must acknowledge the need for flexibility in the dental workforce. Dental Surgery departments vary in terms of workload (both clinical and teaching), staffing complement, and infrastructure.

**College and Faculty Position**

Supporting Professional Activities (SPAs) underpin direct clinical care and reflect time given towards Continuous Professional Development (CPD), dental education, structured teaching, audit work, research, clinical management, service development and local clinical governance in a consultant’s job plan. The College and Faculty believe that normally 2.5 SPAs would provide an adequate amount of time to fulfil these responsibilities for the majority or NHS consultants but should be subject to annual appraisal and job planning.

The College and Faculty advise that a pragmatic approach is taken by its representatives in assessing whether a job plan provides an appropriate balance of activities and that adequate time is provided for supporting professional activities, commensurate to the individual features of the post. Where it is apparent that insufficient SPAs have been granted, Regional Advisors will be encouraged to negotiate directly with the employing authority to ensure that the requirements of the post can be met.

**Job Planning for Existing Consultants**

A consultant does not receive an allowance of SPAs to do with as he or she wishes, but rather agrees to perform a certain amount of work commensurate to the consultant grade and to the service objectives of the employer. This gives the employer the right to monitor the performance of the consultant during SPA time, looking at time spent and outcomes achieved, Consultants remain accountable to their employer for the achievement of agreed objectives in both Direct Clinical Care and SPA time.

The annual job planning process (which may be linked with appraisal) provides an opportunity for the surgeon to demonstrate his or her involvement in SPAs and to discuss, and agree, with their employer the balance of programmed activities accordingly. The precise balance will vary according to local circumstances. Individual consultants should be prepared to justify, through the job planning process, that their allocated SPA time is appropriate, or to negotiate for additional time as required.

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