

Senior Health Employee Contracts

On-call arrangement clarification for visiting medical officers

Clarification of the visiting medical officer (VMO) on-call provisions in the *Total remuneration framework conditions for visiting medical officers (TRF)* is detailed in this document.

Does the new visiting medical officer employment framework introduce '24 hour on-call' payments?

The TRF states that:

'A VMO will not be placed on-call between 7 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday unless required by the service and by agreement with the VMO.'

This means a VMO will not be placed on-call between 7 am to 6 pm unless the Hospital and Health Service (HHS) specifically requires it and the VMO agrees to be available. This does not introduce a '24 hour on-call' arrangement for VMOs.

Under current arrangements, where a VMO is not rostered on-call and receives an urgent request to attend the facility/department for call back, the VMO may elect not to attend. In making a decision to accept or to reject the request, the VMO must consider any existing clinical responsibilities and ethical issues in regard to patient needs. If the VMO accepts the request to attend, then all necessary treatment shall be provided in an appropriate timeframe. In these circumstances the normal exception-based recall payment applies.

The statement in the TRF quoted above recognises a general principle that VMOs will not be rostered on-call during standard hours, but provides flexibility to HHSs by recognising that there may be occasions where rostered on-call during standard hours may be appropriate and necessary. It is important to note that a VMO who is rostered on-call during standard hours may or may not be working in their external private practice, but regardless must be available to respond to calls as per regular on-call arrangements. This includes a requirement that the VMO must be available to attend to the relevant Queensland Health facility immediately if clinically necessary.

Where a VMO is not formally rostered on-call but accepts an urgent request from the HHS, current practices and remuneration will continue and no new remuneration has been introduced for this. There is no new provision regarding VMOs being paid on-call for 24 hours.

Can a visiting medical officer's on-call duties conflict with external private practice commitments?

Yes, but only on the provision that the VMO is able to respond to calls and attend a facility when required. The TRF states:

'Where a service requires a VMO to be on-call outside of the hours 7 am–6 pm Monday to Friday and it is unavoidable that such a requirement conflicts with a VMO's external private practice hours commitments, by agreement, the VMO may be on-call provided the VMO is available to respond to calls when required.'

This specifically refers to time outside of standard hours and recognises situations where VMOs are on an on-call roster and it is unavoidable that this conflicts with the VMO's private practice commitments. It is assumed that where a VMO is not rostered to work during standard hours, they are likely to be working in an external private practice.

Again, it provides flexibility to the HHS and VMO to agree to a working arrangement that provides additional clinical services where required and mutually agreeable. Such formal arrangements necessitate that, in order to be remunerated, the HHS requires that the VMO is fully available to provide clinical services as needed. This includes a requirement that the VMO must be available to attend to the relevant Queensland Health facility immediately if clinically necessary.

Summary

The principles of what constitutes a formal on-call arrangement (eligible for specific remuneration) have not changed. If an HHS is paying an on-call payment, the VMO must be available to be called in. This includes a requirement that the VMO must be available to attend to the relevant Queensland Health facility immediately if clinically necessary. It does not mean that a VMO is entitled to a payment because they may be called based on emergent circumstances while not performing duty for the HHS.