

Guidance for office accommodation and administrative support for consultant posts

Position Statement PS06/2016
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Royal College of Psychiatrists
London

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Replaces PS01/2016 (January 2016)

INTRODUCTION

The Royal College of Psychiatrists provides a range of guidance documents to promote and support the safe and effective recruitment and employment of psychiatrists. In June 2015 the College published a position statement on office accommodation and administrative support for consultant posts, and this statement was revised in January 2016. Following feedback from trusts and College members, we are issuing this revised position statement to clarify what the College regards as good practice.

Consultants are typically based in multi-disciplinary teams, working with a wide range of healthcare professionals, and all team members will have different requirements for working environments at different times. However, consultant psychiatrists are highly trained and experienced clinicians who are often required to make clinical assessments at short notice in order to determine risk and treatment plans in the most complex patient cases. The interests and dignity of patients lie at the heart of the work of consultants, and many of their roles and responsibilities (such as speaking to patients and relatives, dictating highly confidential reports and case notes and liaising with other statutory bodies) demand a genuinely confidential space that is immediately available to consultants, even though the patient may not be present. Furthermore, consultant psychiatrists are senior leaders with diverse roles that often extend beyond their immediate clinical work. These can include specific and unique leadership and management elements, medical education and research, supervision of trainees, etc. These roles require access to a secure, private space at different times if the consultant workforce is to be able to function effectively. It is therefore essential that practical and realistic arrangements are in place which make best use of the consultant's time.

COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

The College's strong recommendation is for consultant psychiatrists to be provided with designated private office space, suitably equipped with appropriate information and communications technology. The consultant would normally be the sole occupier of the office; however, where agreed and negotiated in advance, it could be shared with other consultants and team members (for example, if the consultants job share or work less than full-time). This will allow the consultant(s) to fulfil all of their professional roles and responsibilities in a timely and effective way.

Where provision of a private office for consultants is not practicable, consultants should be provided with a dedicated space which is sufficiently private and resourced to carry out the full range of consultant functions. Such space should include break-out areas, immediately available, where discussions and phone calls can take place in complete confidence. Trusts should ensure this arrangement is discussed with the consultant, with regular review, to ensure they are able to practise safely and effectively. The provision of hot-desks would not meet the College guidance for consultants. Where trusts are able to provide genuinely mobile ways of working, this can often reduce the need for office accommodation. Such a development

should be fully planned in consultation with all the relevant workforce and should not override the general accommodation requirements set out in this guidance.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Psychiatrists require administrative support to ensure production of letters and reports within the time limits agreed between the provider organisation and commissioners, and to enable them to effectively participate in all their roles and responsibilities. Provider organisations should organise their administrative support to facilitate this standard, to ensure high-quality communication between the doctor, their patients and colleagues. Consultants need a named individual who can manage diaries and provide support for non-clinical activities. The named individual should be suitably qualified, accessible and have sufficient time to carry out these duties. Consultants may also need administrative and IT support around mobile working and clinical database management, given the move to more managed care systems of service delivery and the increasing use of databases to support clinical work.

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