



# The Royal College of Surgeons of England

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## Supporting Professional Activities (SPAs) Policy statement

### Medical Professionalism

Medical professionalism signifies a set of values, behaviours and relationships that underpins the trust the public has in surgeons. 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 surgeon and we accept that surgeons 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 surgeons in the exercise of their professional responsibilities. SPA time is part of that organisational infrastructure and provides time in their job plans to help individual surgeons 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.

### 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 surgeon would normally devote on average 7.5 PAs per week to direct clinical care and 2.5 to SPAs.

### College Position

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

### New Posts

As part of our commitment to maintaining standards, our regional advisers approve job descriptions and job plans for advertised consultant posts. The role of the regional adviser 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, regional

advisers must acknowledge the need for flexibility in the surgical workforce. Surgical departments vary in terms of workload (both clinical and teaching), staffing complement, and infrastructure.

### **College Position**

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

The College advises 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 representatives will be encouraged to negotiate directly with the employing Trust 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 surgeons 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.

### **References**

Royal College of Surgeons of England. Guidance for Regional Specialty Advisers on Approving Job Plans: RCS, 2005.

Available from: [http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/publications/docs/guidance\\_regional\\_specialty.html](http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/publications/docs/guidance_regional_specialty.html)

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. Advice on SPAs in Consultant Job Planning. AOMRC, 2010-02-19. Available from:

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