



Doctor's Guidelines  
For  
Implementing Flexibility

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## **PREFACE**

This resource has been developed for the use of medical staff. In particular it is aimed at those who wish to access flexible work options.

This document contains information about the various options available, how to work out what's best for you, develop your case to support your request and work with your supervisor to develop an implementation strategy.

For more detailed information on Flexible Work Option Policies supervisors should refer to the hospital's intranet site under Work/Life. In developing these Doctor's Guidelines for Implementing Flexibility the AMA acknowledges Managing Work | Life Balance as the authors of the original materials.

You can also talk to

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## **A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY**

These guides have been developed to be as widely applicable as possible. For that reason the terminology used in this document is very general. A supervisor, for example, can be taken to mean 'a person with the authority to approve or reject flexible employment options.' For doctors-in-training it is also important to include the Director of Clinical Training (or the equivalent) in these discussions. In some cases this person may not be the same person responsible for the employment conditions. Where that is the case both should be consulted.

Similarly, the guides are intended to be applicable to all doctors in seeking flexible employment options, so that it may be necessary for senior doctors to seek a flexible working arrangement at some point in order to complete further professional development of a maintenance of professional standards program.

## **INTRODUCTION**

[Hospital Name] is committed to providing and maintaining, so far as practicable, a flexible work environment that enables doctors and all staff members to manage their work, family and lifestyle responsibilities. [Hospital Name]'s flexible work options policies and programs enable

staff to meet their workplace commitments and ensure that adequate patient care is always provided, while maintaining a balance between work and life.

The success of a flexible work program depends on a mutually satisfactory agreement that is developed by doctors and their unit supervisors. Both parties are responsible for making the agreement work and both should commit to a process of continuous improvement and evaluation. Initially you need to develop your own case for a flexible work arrangement. Your unit supervisor, or the head of your unit, is then responsible for assessing these requests fairly and equitably and to give reasons for accepting, amending or rejecting any requests. This will allow you to amend your proposal and also to better understand the reason for any possible rejection.

The steps outlined in this Kit will help you to:

- ➔ Understand the options that are available.
- ➔ Develop your own case and application for flexibility in the workplace.
- ➔ Understand the decision making process supervisor will use in assessing your request.
- ➔ In conjunction with your supervisor develop a flexible work agreement that will include details of how your new work arrangement will proceed, how success will be measured and how you can adjust the arrangement if necessary.

## Principles Underlying the Work Flexibility Policy

[Hospital Name] aims to create a sufficiently flexible workplace to allow you to meet your training needs, and provide high quality patient care whilst balancing your work, family and personal responsibilities. To be successful we need the commitment of everyone to achieve the hospitals goal of providing high quality patient care whilst working flexibly. This means that patient care remains the primary consideration.

## What are the options?

There are a range of flexible options that may help you (they are listed in greater detail in the policy document which can be found on the intranet site under work/life section) they include:

- ➔ Part-time work
- ➔ Job-sharing
- ➔ Flexible working hours
- ➔ Flexible return from parental leave
- ➔ Paid maternity leave
- ➔ Flexible work year
- ➔ Compressed work week

[Hospital Name] also provides a number of programs and services that may assist you to balance your work / life responsibilities. These include:

- ➔ Carers leave
- ➔ Child Care and Elder/Carers Information Kit
- ➔ (add your own)
- ➔ .....

## APPLYING FOR A FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENT

You and your supervisor will initially discuss requests for flexible work arrangements. The basis of all flexible work arrangement negotiations is based on mutual respect of each others position and an understanding that flexible work arrangements are not an entitlement, but an opportunity for a review of current work options and flexible work arrangements. In the next section you will find a guide to preparing your case for change. We strongly recommend that you use this process to get ready for any discussions with your supervisor.

Flexible work option arrangements will be established when it is considered to be a viable option with an identified benefit to the hospital and hence patients, with equal consideration being given to the achievement of the hospital's priorities as well as the needs of the employee. When you and your supervisor agree on a flexible work arrangement and have prepared a 'flexible work agreement' you will be required to gain Human Resources approval for your plans.

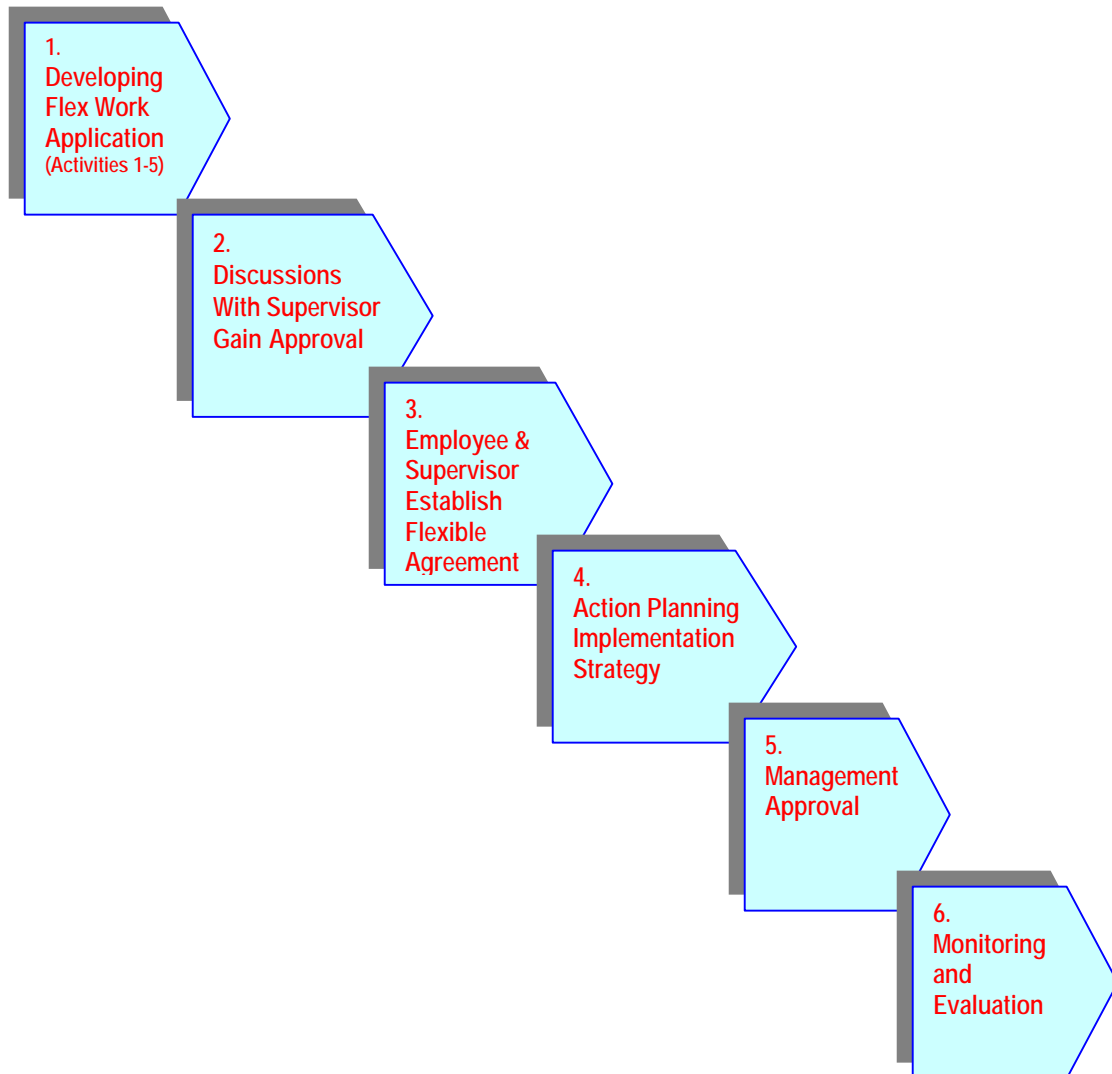
It is recognised in some circumstances that applications for flexibility may be declined by the hospital because of operational requirements such as avoiding any compromise to patient care. Where a request for flexibility is declined and you are dissatisfied with the decision you may access the hospital's complaints procedures.

### How will decisions be made?

In preparing your proposal for a flexible work arrangement it is useful to keep in mind the decision making criteria that your supervisor will use when discussing with you the possibility of accepting your request for a change in your working conditions. It will be helpful to consider these issues as part of the preparation of your case or application, especially where you will need to demonstrate that you have the skills and competencies to work in a different way. For example; if you want to enter into a job sharing agreement, you will have to show to your supervisor that the handover of care will go smoothly and patient care will not be compromised in the process.

Two equally important considerations will be the potential impact on patient care and your work / life issues. Other issues that will influence your supervisor's decision will be the possible impact on other doctors in the unit, as well as the impacts on other staff, any possible increase in costs or an impact on the unit's budget and occupational health and safety implications. Your supervisor will also consider your skills or competencies to be able to meet your performance objectives (KPI's) whilst working flexibly.

## The Key Stages in Getting an Application Approved



In the next part of this Kit you will find a format for developing your application / business case.

## 1. DEVELOPING THE APPLICATION

One of the best ways to access a flexible work arrangement is to prepare and present a well thought out written proposal to your immediate supervisor.

A proposal is the key even though the hospital has a range of policies that allow for flexible work options, it is still **your** responsibility to develop your case for being granted a flexible work agreement, which shows the benefits of the arrangement. The proposal should outline how your job function will be effectively maintained under your proposed flexible work arrangement.

Following the steps outlined here will help you prepare and devise a sound, convincing application to present to your supervisor.

### Step 1 – Why Do You Want Greater Flexibility?

Having a clear understanding of why you want greater flexibility will help you to build your case and motivate you to persevere in presenting the options and alternatives especially if you face some initial opposition. In this section you will find out how to prepare your application and to present a coherent case for a flexible arrangement.

### Activity 1

Write yourself a list of the personal reasons you need greater flexibility in your working environment. Answer some or all of the following questions (you do not have to show this information to anyone else):

- ➔ What will greater flexibility or a change in working hours bring to you personally?
- ➔ What will the changes allow you to do that you can't do now?
- ➔ What would you continue to do?
- ➔ What would you stop doing?
- ➔ What is your vision for the future?

It will be helpful to keep the answers to these questions in your mind as you work through your proposal. However, it is **important to note** that you **do not** have to disclose the personal reasons for your application.

## Step 2 – Which Type of Flexible Work Option Will Best Suit Your Needs?

In [Hospital Name] Work/Family policy document or on the company's intranet site under work/life you will see a description of the many options that are potentially available. You should consider the options available and how they might assist you.

### Activity 2

Look at what is available and draw up you 'short-list' of the best options for you. If appropriate talk to other people who are using these options. You may also wish to discuss your initial thoughts with Human Resources. The AMA website also contains valuable resources on work life flexibility. The website is at [www.ama.com.au](http://www.ama.com.au).

## Step 3 – Personal Implications of Your Proposed New Work Arrangement?

### Activity 3

You will need to consider the implications of any changes to your working hours, day, or work location. For example if you are changing your hours, will public transport be as accessible as it is during peak travel times? Would working from home mean you have to give up the spare bedroom and turn it into an office? This might work well if you don't need the room for visitors, but would become a challenge if you have family and friends who regularly want to visit for the weekend.

If you are reducing your hours can you afford the reduction in salary? You may need to take the time to review your budget and the long-term implications of living on a reduced salary. Consider too the potential impact on your superannuation entitlements.

If, after assessing your financial needs, you believe you cannot reduce your hours, consider some other alternatives. It might mean that you continue to work full time but use some other flexible option such as 'working from home for part of the week' or accessing the compressed work week option. During this part of your planning process it will be important to involve your partner or others who will be impacted by your decision. If necessary consult with a financial counsellor to assist you in your decision making. You can access a counsellor through the Employee Assistance Program.

## Step 4 – Prepare Your Case

As part of your preparation to present your proposal you need to consider the impact of your requested changes on the workplace. It helps your supervisor agree to your request if you have thought through the issue from their perspective. For example; there may be an initial concern that working flexible hours will mean the patient will 'suffer' from compromised care, whereas in the long-term patients may benefit from having access to staff available for a longer time each



















**6. How do you plan to overcome these potential problems?**

**In regard to remaining up to date I can be included on all hospital and Ward mailing lists even while on leave. In regard to attending meetings outside my part time work hours, I can ensure in negotiation, to be able to be present for these, when they cannot be scheduled during my working hours.**

**7. Will you need any additional equipment? Are there any additional costs (that you are aware of) associated with your request?**

**There will be some costs due to the need to employ another doctor to work part-time upon my return.**

**8. What cost-benefits will accrue to the hospital if your request is approved?**

**The hospital will be seen as an employer of choice who assists families in balancing their work and family responsibilities.**

**9. What measures do you believe can be used to assess how your performance is meeting or exceeding expectation?**

**Normal KPIs can apply once I return to take up part-time employment.**

**10. What review process do you propose for monitoring and improvement of your flexible work option?**

**Arrangements can be monitored on a monthly basis.**

(To be completed by the Supervisor)

11. **Supervisor Comments. How will this option help or hinder patient care provided in your unit?**

**It is important for the Ward to retain Jane's services. This will involve covering Jane's shifts during her absence, but I note that the hospital is required to provide this maternity leave.**

12. **Please give your reasons for approving or declining this request.**

**I am approving the request with a minor amendment. The Hospital's industrial agreement requires that women have access to 3 months paid maternity leave, or 6 months maternity leave at part time. I am thus reducing the total period of maternity leave to six months, from 1 month prior to the expected birth to 5 months after the birth, in line with the hospitals responsibilities. I note that Jane has applied for 1 month annual leave at the end of her agreed period of maternity leave.**

**Date 9/11/04**

**Supervisor's Signature M Blog**

**Date 9/11/04**

**Employee's Signature *Jane Smith***

**On completion of discussions regarding this request the Supervisor and the Employee should retain a copy and one copy sent to Human Resources**

## 2. DISCUSSION WITH SUPERVISOR

Having completed your planner you should request a meeting with your supervisor to discuss your proposal in some detail. Try to organise a time when you will both be free of interruptions or will not have to rush the meeting because of other commitments.

Organise a room where your privacy can be assured and where you will not be disturbed.

Have a copy of your proposal for both your supervisor and yourself and if necessary have a copy of the flexible work options policies available for your reference.

To help your supervisor understand your situation and your request you are likely to need to explain your answers to the various questions on the planner. However you should not feel pressured to discuss personal issues or other information that you feel is private and has no impact on your supervisor's decision.

In order to ensure patient care and the smooth running of the unit, your supervisor may ask you to adjust some of your request. You should try to work together to resolve any problems or concerns.

Once you and your supervisor have agreed on how your request will work and the framework for the new work arrangement you need to prepare a written document that will outline the key components of the agreement. This can then be used to assess how well the arrangement is working by both you and your supervisor. It should also be included with the documentation sent to Human Resources who will give the final approval for your request.

## 3. DOCTOR AND SUPERVISOR ESTABLISH FLEXIBLE WORK AGREEMENT

### Activity 1

- In conjunction with your supervisor agree how the new arrangement will work and write a flexible work agreement. The supervisor's flexible work guide has full details of what should be in this agreement. However you will need to consider and include details of changes to your working hours, salary, and your performance goals and how success will be measured. The duration of the agreement, any materials or equipment you will need and any possible impact on OH&S issues.
- Writing this agreement may mean you need to have several meetings with your supervisor and other doctors in the unit. It can be helpful to remember that they will be concerned about the possible impact of any changes on their workload or ability of the unit to manage its patient load. You will need to have given thought to these concerns and how they may be addressed to help gain agreement and commitment to the changes you propose.
- It is the supervisor's responsibility (having accepted a doctor's request to work flexibly) to work with the doctor to develop a flexible work agreement that will outline how the new arrangement will work. It is unlikely that any two arrangements will be the same so the following steps are guidelines that will help you both to develop a win-win agreement. Once

you have reached agreement on all of the criteria below then it should be written up and signed by both parties.

### Issues That Need to be Considered and Covered in the Agreement

- 1.** Confirm just what the flexible arrangement will be. Is it a change of hours or a job-share arrangement or working from home or another type of flexible working?
- 2.** How many hours per week / month will the doctor be working? Will there be a change in the number of rostered shifts, will these shifts be longer or shorter? Do the arrangements still comply with the AMA's Safe Hours code?
- 3.** If it is necessary how have you changed the workload of the doctor to reflect the changes in work-time (if moving from full to part-time work, or establishing a job-share arrangement)?
- 4.** If moving to a part-time or job-share arrangement, is clinical handover addressed?
- 5.** What will be the impact on the doctor's salary and any other benefits? You should refer to Human Resources for clarification. Also check that the doctor understands the implications of any change as this may impact their decision to access the flexible work option.
- 6.** If the doctor wishes to return to standard working conditions (at some later date) how will this be addressed?
- 7.** Is there any potential for the doctor to work from home for some administrative duties?
- 8.** How will performance be measured? What are the performance criteria, eg patient care?
- 9.** How will you both communicate with each other and with other doctors in the unit? What frequency? What will happen if you need to make contact with each other if a work – related crisis occurs?
- 10.** Identify how holidays / leave and other absences will be covered if this is an issue that affects ongoing patient care and contact.
- 11.** What is the trial period and how will you both monitor and measure success?
- 12.** The agreement should list any additional equipment or materials supplied to the doctor (for example if the employee moves to a working from home situation the hospital may supply some equipment).
- 13.** Consider how potential conflicts will be resolved and outline this process in the agreement.

Having completed your flexible work agreement and gained approval from Human Resources you will need an implementation plan.

## 4. DEVELOP AN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Now you have your agreement you and your supervisor need to prepare and implement your new flexible work plan. Some things you will need to do include:

### Activity 1

- Consider if any aspects of your job need to be re-designed, or allocated to other people.
- Confirm how your performance will be measured based on deliverables rather than the length of time you work.
- Talk with other doctors in the unit, other staff and patients about the forthcoming changes.
- Agree the start date and the dates for monitoring progress.
- Get started.

## 5. MANAGEMENT APPROVAL

Once your plans and work agreements have been completed send full details and all supporting materials to XXX.

## 6. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

It will be important for both you and your supervisor to regularly assess how well the new arrangement is working. You will need to check that you are able to meet the personal needs that were your original motivation for change. Your supervisor will need to be sure that you are also meeting the requirements of the job. It will be important to stick to the monitoring schedule that you established in your flexible work agreement plan. The following monitoring steps might help.

### Activity 1

As part of your evaluation and monitoring process consider and answer the following questions. Discuss your conclusions with your team leader as part of your on-going evaluation process.

- Consider why you moved to a flexible work arrangement? Are those goals now being met? If not what still needs to be changed or fine-tuned?
- What have been the greatest successes of the new work arrangement?
- Are you meeting your performance criteria? If not what is hindering your progress and what needs to be changed?
- How are your colleagues and patients reacting? What are the positives and on-going challenges? How can you build on your successes and overcome the difficulties?
- Where to from here?