



Introduction

General practitioners (GPs) and their teams provide continuous, coordinated and comprehensive healthcare to their patients. GPs know their patients' medical histories, can undertake preventive care, manage chronic health conditions and coordinate patients' multidisciplinary care needs. Patients should be encouraged and supported to receive care from their regular GP. When their regular GP or practice is not available, patients should be encouraged to access an after-hours services provider who has an agreement with the practice to provide care during the after-hours period.

It is therefore in a patient's best interests for their regular general practice to have an arrangement with an after-hours service provider. These kinds of formal agreements can ensure safe and high-quality patient care by facilitating continuity of care and timely handover of clinical patient information.

This guide

This guide has been developed for members of The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) to provide support when seeking to establish, or recommit to, a formal arrangement with an after-hours service provider.

The guide provides:

- a list that you can use when considering an agreement offered by an after-hours service provider
- an example of an agreement that you can adapt when making your own agreement with an after-hours service provider.

Many practices participate in the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) After Hours Incentive, which requires a formal agreement between a general practice and an after-hours service provider to qualify for Level 1, 2 or 3 payments. This guide may assist practices to meet this requirement

The RACGP's *Standards for general practices* (5th edition) requires general practices to have suitable arrangements in place for their patients to access after-hours services. The RACGP recommends that your practice seeks to enter an agreement with an after-hours service provider who has been accredited against the RACGP's *Standards for after-hours and medical deputising services*.

You are not required to use the suggested format or to meet all of the conditions in this guide. Instead, this resource has been developed to provide guidance on some of the areas you and your practice should consider when entering into an agreement with an after-hours service provider. This guide and the accompanying example agreement are not intended to replace contractual or commercial agreements that may already be in place between your general practice and an after-hours service provider.

What should be included in an agreement

The list below can be used to assess an agreement provided by an after-hours service provider. It may assist you in making sure that important aspects are covered prior to entering into an agreement with a provider. It may also assist in guiding a conversation between your practice and an after-hours provider when developing an agreement.

After-hours service provider's obligations

At a minimum, any agreement your practice enters into should detail how the after-hours service will achieve the following.

1. Provide your practice with a key contact point within the after-hours service
2. Remind all patients that services are supplementary, and that it is important that the patient attends your practice for ongoing and comprehensive care
3. Provide care to the patients of your practice within the after-hours period (specifying what level of cover/hours it will provide)
4. Ensure that only appropriately trained and experienced doctors and support personnel attend to your patients
5. Send a summary detailing the clinical management of your patient to you or your practice by the next day (with the patient's consent and via secure communications)
6. Communicate directly with your practice whenever deemed necessary or appropriate by the attending after-hours doctor in relation to the care of your patients
7. Provide your practice with information about the after-hours service to display in the general practice
8. Meet periodically with your practice in order to review and update key contact or patient information

Your practice's obligations

The agreement should also set out the following.

1. How the after-hours service provider can contact your practice in an emergency or under exceptional circumstances
2. That your practice will provide clinical information to the after-hours service regarding complex patients who may regularly require after-hours care
3. That your practice will periodically meet with the after-hours service provider in order to review and update key contact or patient information

You may also wish to consider the following.

4. Discussing how the after-hours service provider can triage a patient to your general practice the next day
5. Advising the after-hours service provider how your practice will provide information on patient medications on occasions where this is required

Example agreement

The example agreement below can be adapted by your practice to suit your requirements or particular circumstances.

Practice name

Service agreement for the provision of after-hours services to patients of

General practice details and contact information

Name of practice

Practice address

Usual hours of practice

Practice telephone

Practice email

After-hours service details and contact information

Name of service

Service address (if applicable)

Usual hours of practice

Service telephone

Service email

Agreement terms

Practice name

After-hours service

This agreement confirms

appointment of

as its provider of after-hours medical services.

For the purposes of this agreement, the after-hours period is defined as Monday to Friday from 6.00 pm to 8.00 am, Saturdays from midday, all day Sunday and all day on gazetted public holidays.

After-hours service

Under this agreement,

will:

Practice name

After-hours service

1. Provide with a point of contact within
2. Remind all patients that the services are supplementary and that it is important that the patient has their own, regular GP for ongoing and comprehensive care
3. Provide care to the patients of between Specify hours
4. Ensure that only appropriately trained and experienced doctors and support personnel attend to the patients of Practice name
5. Send a summary detailing the clinical management of the patient to the patient's regular GP by the next day (with the patient's consent and via secure communications)
6. Communicate with Practice name directly whenever deemed necessary or appropriate by the attending after-hours doctor in relation to the care of its patients
7. Provide Practice name with information about the after-hours service to display in the practice
8. Meet periodically with Practice name in order to review and update key contact or patient information

Practice name

will:

1. Provide After-hours service with an up-to-date list of contact details for emergency or exceptional circumstances
2. Meet periodically with After-hours service in order to review and update key contact or patient information

Notice period

This service agreement will remain in force unless terminated by one of the parties by providing

notice in

Notice format

Signed on behalf of

Practice name

Signed on behalf of

After-hours service

Date

Date

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