

1.1.4 Care outside normal opening hours

Practices must have suitable arrangements in place for their patients to be able to access after hours care if or when they need to. Patients being able to access care at any hour is part of a practice's responsibility to provide comprehensive and continual care.

RACGP 4th Edition Standards

- 1.1.4** *Our practice ensures safe and reasonable arrangements for medical care for patients outside our normal opening hours.*

Assessment methods

- Interview with GPs and staff

Surveyors will interview practice GPs, nurses and administrative staff, who will be able to demonstrate they are aware of the after hours arrangements in place and how patients are advised of these arrangements.

- Document review of patient health records

The GP surveyor will look for evidence of after hours consultation notes when reviewing current health records.

- Review of methods used to communicate arrangements to patients

Surveyors will confirm the appropriate methods are used to advise patients of the after hours care arrangements in place. This includes a message on the practice's telephone answering machine, call diversion system or paging system, a sign visible from outside the building and via the practice information sheet.

Meeting the Standards

Patients must be able to access care during the defined after hours period, which is outside 8am and 6pm on weekdays and 8am and 12pm on Saturdays, and all day and night on Sundays and public holidays. This could be met by practice GPs providing their own care, individually or through a roster, or by having formal arrangements with a local co-operative, an accredited medical deputising service, or an accredited hospital or after hours facility.

Practice staff must be familiar with the after hours care arrangements and be able to confidently advise patients accordingly.

Best practice

If an after hours service is used, practices will ideally have a documented agreement including reference to the timely reporting of care provided back to the patient's nominated GP, a defined means of access to patient health information for the deputising practitioner (and to practice GPs in exceptional circumstances), and confirmation by the service that after

hours care will be provided by appropriately qualified health professionals. A formal agreement was previously required to meet the Standards, and is still very much recommended.