



## **Duty Hours Overview**

### **What are duty hours?**

Duty hours are the amount of time resident and fellow physicians spend on clinical experience and education in their specialty or subspecialty, after completion of medical school.

“Clinical experience and education” represents the nature of these hours, which include all clinical and academic activities related to a program. This includes patient care (both inpatient and outpatient); administrative duties relative to patient care; the provision for transfer of patient care; time spent in-house during call activities; and scheduled activities, such as conferences.

Duty hours do not include reading and preparation time spent away from the education site.

### **To whom do duty hours (hours dedicated to clinical experience and education) apply?**

Duty hours within graduate medical education apply to residents and fellows. Residents are any physicians in accredited graduate medical education programs practicing under supervision. This includes fellows, or physicians who have completed the requirements for eligibility for first board certification in their specialty and are focusing on subspecialty education and training.

### **How are duty hours related to the Common Program Requirements?**

Duty hours are part of Section VI of the ACGME’s Common Program Requirements, as referenced above. This section includes standards on Professionalism, Personal Responsibility, and Patient Safety; Transitions of Care; Fatigue Management; Clinical Responsibilities; Teamwork; and Resident/Fellow Duty Hours.

### **How often does the ACGME review the requirements for duty hours?**

A regular review of all sections of the Common Program Requirements is critical, due to the rapid changes occurring in the health care system and technological advances in medicine, to ensure that the learning environment keeps pace with the changing demands in patient care and resident/fellow education. The ACGME has committed to review the Common Program Requirements (Section VI) addressing hours dedicated to clinical experience and education (duty hours) every five years.

The review process for the Common Program Requirements is currently underway, starting with Section VI. The Common Program Requirements Phase 1 Task Force assembled in the fall of 2015, and began its work in January 2016.

### **What is the process for making changes to the Common Program Requirements, including the requirements governing duty hours? Who is involved?**

In order to make changes to any section of the Common Program Requirements, the ACGME Board of Directors commissions a Task Force to focus on collecting information, assessing whether changes are needed, and proposing revisions to existing requirements.

The Task Force develops recommendations to be considered and approved by the ACGME Board of Directors based on review of scholarly research and input from position statements from its member organizations, constituent organizations, and other stakeholders.

The ACGME provides a 45-day public comment period, as part of the standard process used to create and/or modify all Program Requirements, for any proposed revisions. Comments received are categorized and provided by the Task Force as part of the recommendations made to the ACGME Board of Directors.

### **When did duty hours go into effect?**

While the specialty of internal medicine had established duty hour specifications previously, in 2002, the ACGME specified requirements for all accredited programs formally for the first time. The process and requirements have evolved over the years. Read the full history [here](#).

### **Are there specialties with different duty hours?**

Yes, the specialty Review Committees can choose to modify these hours only to make them shorter or more stringent. Certain specialties have different duty hours, the reasons for which are explained in their specialty-specific Program Requirements. For example, emergency medicine physicians operate on 12-hour shifts. More details can be found in the Program Requirements for Graduate Medical Education in Emergency Medicine.