

What activities are included in "duty hours"?

Duty hours are defined as all clinical and academic activities related to the residency program. This includes clinical cases (both inpatient and outpatient care), administrative duties related to clinical cases, the provision for transfer of patient care, time spent in-house during call activities, and scheduled academic activities such as conferences, journal club, and grand rounds. Also included in duty hours are all hours spent on activities required by the accreditation standards such as memberships on hospital committees, or any activities that are an accepted practice in residency programs, such as participating in interviewing residency candidates. Duty hours do not include reading, studying, and preparation time spent away from the hospital or ambulatory site. For call from home, only the hours spent in the hospital after being called in count toward duty hours.

What does "averaged over a four-week period" mean?

This means that the average should be working hours within, and not across, rotations. It is not appropriate to combine rotations having in-house call with those that do not include call to obtain a lower average. Similarly, it is inappropriate to average a vacation week (with 0 hours worked) with regular duty weeks to obtain a lower average.

Does the "1 day in 7 free" mean that I must have 1 day per week off?

It is common in smaller surgical residency programs to have residents on duty one weekend (Friday and Sunday for instance), so they can be off the next weekend. As long as duty hours requirements are met within the specified averages, this type of every other weekend schedule is acceptable.

Note that for in-house call, adequate rest (generally 10 hours) must be provided between weekend duty periods. There are no exceptions to this rule and it is not averaged across 4 weeks. Thus, in-house call on two consecutive nights (e.g., Friday and Saturday) is not permitted, unless the residents are given a rest period of about 10 hours between the two shifts.

How does the ACGME define "adequate time for rest" between duty shifts?

This is generally defined as 10 hours, however programs may provide somewhat shorter rest periods when appropriately educationally justified. Allowing added time for didactic lectures of high importance, or for surgical experience in rare cases or cases with particular educational value, are examples most Review Committees would consider appropriate.

If I'm on call from home, but I have to go to the hospital, is that in-house call?

For call taken from home, any time spent in the hospital after being called in is counted toward duty hours. Call from home that does not result in travel to the hospital or clinical site is NOT to be included in duty hours.

If call from home isn't included in duty hours, is it permissible for me to take call from home or night float for extended periods, such as a month?

No. The requirement that 1 day in 7 be free of patient care responsibilities would prohibit being assigned home call for an entire month. Assignment of a partial month (more than six days but less than 24 days) is possible. However, keep in mind that call from home is appropriate if the service intensity and frequency of being called is low. The ACGME requires that programs monitor the intensity and workload resulting from home call, through periodic assessment of work load and intensity of the in-house activities.

Do I include my research project in duty hours worked?

Research time is included if it is a program-required activity. If the research is pursued on the resident or fellow's own time (without program requirement), it is not included in on-duty time.

What does "didactics" mean?

The word didactic refers to systematic instruction by means of planned learning experiences such as class room lectures, conferences, and grand rounds. It is often used in contrast with "clinical" education.

How should I interpret the Resident Survey duty hour response options?

Very often – very frequently; extremely often

Often - frequently; many times; not seldom

Sometimes - on some occasions; at times

Rarely – infrequently

Never - at no time; not ever

Other information about the ACGME duty hour standards may be found here:

www.acgme.org/acWebsite/dutyhours/dh_index.asp