



Agenda for Change

London Ambulance Service NHS Trust working in partnership with UNISON, GMB, Amicus and TGWU

19 September 2006

Issue 33

Review of arrangements for operational rest breaks

A joint working group has been set up to review arrangements for operational rest breaks to enable us to comply with changes to staff's terms and conditions and health and safety regulations.

With the introduction of Agenda for Change terms and conditions of employment, we are required to harmonise the hours of the working week to 37.5 hours excluding rest breaks.

For many years consistent management of operational rest breaks has proved to be a challenge for the Service. Breaks are rarely requested by operational staff and rarely offered by control staff; a situation that over time has become generally accepted as the norm.

With current rosters based on a 39-hour working week inclusive of breaks, staff are effectively available throughout their shift. This situation does not reflect the requirements of the European Working Time Directive - these health and safety regulations aim to ensure that all staff are offered a rest break when working for any one period in excess of six hours. Regardless of this, we have a duty to ensure that breaks are offered to staff particularly given the nature of ambulance work.

Taking all of this into account, the current arrangements cannot continue.

There is a need for us to jointly review arrangements for rest breaks for operational staff; namely those staff working in A&E, Patient Transport Service, Control Services and Resource Centres.

The intent of the joint working group that has been established to conduct this review is to:

Produce a rest break agreement that is easy to understand, manage, administer and audit which complies with Agenda for Change and legislation. The outcome of this agreement should be that operational staff have an uninterrupted rest break during each shift worked, with an aspiration that all staff will benefit from formal rest breaks.

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Rest Breaks

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We recognise staff will have questions about this issue, and whilst much of the work to produce an agreement is in its early stages, we have attached a series of Q&As which we hope will help to clarify the current situation.

We are working towards agreeing and introducing these new arrangements for rest breaks as soon as is practically possible. Staff will be kept informed of progress by jointly agreed bulletins, as well as through their local managers, trade union representatives, station administrators and, in the case of Control Services staff, through resource centre staff.

Alternatively you can speak with members of the joint working group:

Eric Roberts (Co-chair) Staff side
Steve Sale (Co-chair) HR
Eddie Brand: Staff side
Angie Patton: Communications
Bob Buck: Staff side
Darren Jobson: Staff side
Don Willatgamuwa: Finance
Graham Griffiths: Control Services
Greg Masters: HR
Joe Easterbrook: Staff side
John O'Grady/Shani Phipps: Resource Centres
Nic Daw: PTS Operations
Pat Osliff: Staff side
Peter Thorpe: Ambulance Operations Manager
Richard Webber: Assistant Director Operations
Tony Crabtree: HR



Eric Roberts
Operational Rest Breaks Working Group Joint Chair
(Trade Unions on behalf of UNISON, GMB,
Amicus, TGWU)



Steve Sale
Operational Rest Breaks Working Group Joint Chair
(Management-side)

Q&As about rest breaks

Much of the work to produce a rest break agreement is in its early stages, but staff will no doubt have questions at this point. Below are some questions and answers to help clarify the current situation.

Why are uninterrupted rest breaks being introduced?

There are a number of reasons why we are going to provide staff with uninterrupted rest breaks.

We need to align the current working week (39 hours inclusive of breaks) with that set out under Agenda for Change (37.5 hours exclusive of breaks).

Where operational staff are concerned, breaks are rarely offered or requested at present, meaning staff are effectively available throughout the whole of their shifts. This does not meet health and safety legislation which requires staff to be offered a rest break when they work any period in excess of six hours.

Equally, we have a duty to ensure staff get a break during their shift, bearing in mind the demanding nature of ambulance work – both on the road and in the control rooms and resource centres.

How many staff will get rest breaks?

The aim is for all staff to be offered a rest break during their shift. Being realistic this may take some time to achieve, but we will be doing all we can to get to this point as soon as possible.

How long will my break be?

The length of your break may depend on the length of your shift. No decisions on duration of breaks have been made at this stage; we are still looking at what these might look like for different shifts.

How will I be allocated my break?

It will be up to the control rooms (Emergency Operations Centre and Urgent Operations Centre) to manage the allocation of breaks to operational staff. There is some work being done at present to decide on the logistics of how this will be achieved, including when breaks will be allocated and how they will be recorded.

Will my rest break be uninterrupted?

The principle is that all staff should have an uninterrupted rest break during their shift. Additional operational staff have been employed to help cover rest breaks and increased annual leave created under Agenda for Change. The remit of the joint working group is to come up with an approach to enable staff to be given uninterrupted breaks, and this will involve looking at when breaks will be allocated, and how cover will be provided etc. However, the group must also consider whether there are any exceptional circumstances when breaks may have to be interrupted, and what will happen in these circumstances.

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What if under exceptional circumstances I don't get my break?

Consideration is being given to how staff are compensated if they don't get their rest break. Under Agenda for Change, for instance, one option is that staff can be given the time back at a later date.

Do I still get my subsistence payment if I don't get a break?

Arrangements for subsistence payments are outside of Agenda for Change terms and conditions, and therefore do not fall within the remit of the rest break joint working group. However, any legitimate claim for subsistence will still be accepted.

Where can I take my rest break?

The issue of where breaks can be taken is currently being looked at. Where operational staff (A&E and PTS) are concerned, for example, we need to think about the suitability of locations eg local ambulance stations, hospitals etc. There will no doubt be some places that would not be suitable, but these have yet to be identified. Consideration also needs to be given to what dress code applies if staff are on rest breaks away from stations.

Will managers be used to provide cover?

One issue that is being considered is how managers will be used to provide rest break cover at peak periods.

Will I get a break if I'm working on a night shift?

Rest breaks will be allocated on all shifts.

When will the new rest break arrangement come in?

We are working towards agreeing and starting to introduce the new arrangements as soon as is practically possible.

We recognise there will be a number of unanswered questions at this time, but as the work of the joint working group progresses we will keep staff in touch with developments and any decisions that are made. We would also encourage staff to raise questions with their local managers or trade union representatives which can be fed back up to the joint working group for consideration.