

Clerkship On-Call Policy
Dartmouth Medical School
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The primary educational goals for third and fourth year clerkships is to help medical students learn about the evaluation and management of patients with a variety of medical conditions, and expand their levels of mastery in a number of important competency domains. A second important goal is for students to have the opportunity to learn more about each discipline as a potential career choice, from both residents and attendings. We recognize that some of the best opportunities for learning occur on nights and weekends, while “on call”, and we encourage having students take call during clerkships when it is feasible and productive. Student conferences led by faculty are also excellent learning experiences and are required in all clerkships. Students often learn best by active participation in patient care, especially following patients and taking responsibility for their care over time as their condition evolves and changes. Students also learn best when not excessively tired. Sometimes these two goals—enhancing student learning by hands-on experiences, and minimizing excessive student fatigue—come into conflict.

Interns and residents in post-graduate training are now required to limit their total in-hospital work-and-learning hours to no more than 80 hours a week, with no more than 30 consecutive hours on call with direct patient-care responsibilities, and with at least one 24 hour period per week totally “off” —and out of the hospital. These requirements for GME programs were instituted in response to concerns about patient safety and in recognition that the dual roles of house staff in learning and service needed thoughtful balance. These concerns are less directly relevant for medical students for several reasons. Students do not have ultimate responsibility for patient care, procedures, prescribing, etc.; and, students often obtain more sleep during nights on call than residents, since they may admit just one or two patients compared to 3-10 admitted by residents.

Nevertheless, the MEC believes that some regulation of student hours “on call” during clerkships is reasonable in order to provide the optimum learning experience for all students on all clerkships at DMS. In addition to being the “right” thing to do, the LCME requires each school to develop a school-wide policy in this area.

The DMS policy on clerkship hours in Years 3 and 4 will therefore be as follows:

- 1) The frequency of on-call schedules for each clerkship will be established by clerkship directors for their own clerkships, with the intent of optimizing the total educational experience for each student. No student should be on call more often than one night in three, unless as part of a “night float” system.
- 2) Students will not perform patient care activities on the wards or in clinics for more than 80 hours per week.
- 3) At least one 24 hour period every 14 days will be free of all patient care activities, and will be spent outside the hospital.
- 4) When post-call, students must complete patient care activities no later than 30 hours after the start of the on-call day. Usually this means finishing patient care activities by 1 PM on a post-call day.
- 5) Students should attend required teaching conferences, such as those run by clerkship directors, even when post-call. However, these teaching conferences must end by 4 PM.
- 6) On-call rooms at DHMC will be available for post-call students wishing to take a nap prior to driving home after their nights on call, if they feel too tired to drive home safely.