

Top tips on flexible working

Academy Flexible Careers Committee

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General principles

1. Find ways to focus on outputs and benefits for patients (what is produced or done) rather than inputs (hours worked from home or in the hospital).
2. Have a clear directorate Flexible Working Policy so everyone understands the process and the policy. Encourage good problem solving and innovative solution finding rather than defensiveness and adherence to traditional ways of working. Include guidance on how to manage confidentiality of patient data.
3. Do not feel guilty.
4. Learn to say no.

Time keeping

1. Think about what your Out of office says. Be clear as to when people can expect you to get back to them and say something like "I do not work for ...X trust .. on a Friday"- making it clear you value your non-NHS time doing whatever it is you want! Blocking off personal time in your diary or Greying off the days in the week that you do not work.
2. Block out regular whole or half-days on your Outlook calendar to minimise work creep.
3. If you have non-work time, book something into it such as a regular gym session or coffee with a friend. This stops you or anyone else booking work into this time. Make sure it is on your work Outlook calendar if you have one.
4. Once the workday is finished, turn off your computer – do not go back to it.
5. Micro flexing. If you have late CPD, or a late meeting then make sure you take that time in lieu elsewhere as much as is feasible.
6. If your trust wants to give you a separate smart phone brilliant, if not turn off the notifications of unread emails on your one and only phone.
7. Mute WhatsApp work groups whenever you are not needed to be immediately reactive.
8. Better to have morning than afternoon half-days – it is easy to stay beyond lunchtime once you are at work.
9. Before opening your emails make a list of your own important/urgent tasks for that day (before you get sidetracked dealing with everyone else's!)
10. Put your "big rocks" in your diary for the week before filling gaps with everything else that needs doing.
11. Remember whenever you agree to a meeting it will also require time for preparation/reading papers and actions afterwards- so schedule those times in your diary too. If a meeting requires no preparation or action time then question whether you need to attend at all.



Job Planning

1. Make sure you are being paid for what you are doing – lots of job plans for 6 PAs are heavier than those for 10 PAs.
2. Directorate Strategy. Be clear on the reasons why you want to offer flexible working including work from home and acknowledge the benefits it brings to patient services. This will make resistance from those who are anti-flexible working easier to overcome. There may be financial or personal reasons why some staff oppose flexible working.
3. Analyse what the right balance of working from home to onsite might be for individuals and specialties to ensure staff aren't compromised if too many requests for flexible working are submitted.
4. Study or SPA time should be in your timetable and can be routinely worked at home to fit around other commitments (if you are 50% WTE, this can equate to 2 days on-site plus a half-day at home).

Working from Home

1. Set clear boundaries for remote working in relation to communication, work/office space, travelling, staff education, departmental management and multidisciplinary team meetings, video consultations, etc.
2. When working from home start the day with the jobs you absolutely want to get done that day - eg writing a business case/ clinic admin/ a virtual meeting.
3. Enforce some way to make yourself move from the computer at the end of the day (picking up children/ eating dinner with them) otherwise it is easy to sit in front of the computer until much later in the day than you ever would do if at work.
4. In meetings from home- blur your home background and don't be afraid to take on and chair meetings- show people who are rapidly embracing the F2F culture that a well chaired virtual meeting can be more effective.
5. Have a dedicated space at home for working ideally that is yours only. Arrange this space to suit you and get what you need to do it: this is part of your job and you need the correct tools. Any personal expenses incurred can be put into your tax return. If possible, ask your trust to provide equipment – you may be surprised what is available. The environment in you work at home is suitable, i.e. quiet, free from interruptions and properly resourced with equipment equivalent to the normal workplace. This might include a video or telephone link. Conditions should meet acceptable standards of occupational health and safety requirements.
6. Working from home can and should be audited, and anyone taking part should agree to this. For example a pathologist could include turnaround times and accuracy of generated.

Communication and IT

1. Educational supervision and appraisal is amazingly effective virtually for both parties, a really good way to let trainees feel that it is reasonable for them to undertake non clinical work at home.
2. Encourage trainees to go home and do their QIP/Audit/ CPD at home, get them to arrange virtual meetings from home.
3. The more flexible workers you have the more you need to improve communication. You have to keep people in the loop and communicate often.
4. Get advice and involve HR and IT from the start rather than later before problems crop up. Little issues may become big issues if not well managed. IT assistance is essential for setting up digital and remote working technology that is secure and protects patient confidentiality.



Wellbeing and culture

1. Take regular breaks from your screens during home working days.
2. Schedule some time each day to look after yourself.
3. Create a culture and environment where all staff feel comfortable to raise frustrations and concerns about their own and others' working patterns so they can be discussed before resentment sets in. The culture you are aiming for is one of give and take. Newly appointed staff who wish to work flexibly may meet resistance from older staff who work in more traditional full-time on site roles.

References

1. 10 top tips on how to make flexible working 'work' in your business. Jaluch. <https://www.jaluch.co.uk/hr-blast/10-top-tips-on-how-to-make-flexible-working-work-in-your-business/>
2. Best practice recommendations. Reporting cellular pathology samples at home. Royal College of Pathologists. 2020 <https://www.rcpath.org/uploads/assets/fd9c987e-e6a4-45be-8a4ddc81c0b3adda/G017-BPR-Reporting-cellular-pathology-samples-at-home.pdf>