



How to write a roster – Melissa Dobbyn

APEX Delegate Training

Dear Colleagues

There are three main principles to keep in mind when rostering, be it writing a roster, commenting on a roster or reviewing a roster:

1. Rostering directly impacts on health and safety
2. Rostering directly impacts on productivity and quality of care for patients
3. And number 1 directly impacts on number 2. If you are not health and safe you cannot deliver care safely.

Employers have an obligation under health and safety legislation to ensure that any harm that can befall an employee is eliminated or minimised and this includes rostering. Safety is not an optional extra but a core function. If that harm cannot be eliminated then the risk must be managed including ongoing monitoring and reassessment. Just because a roster is deemed safe now does not mean it will be forever.

Financial constraints do not outweigh health and safety, if a safer roster requires more people then more people must be hired regardless of cost.

There is a level of responsibility on the part of the employee to also ensure they are well rested so if you choose to spend your break time at a night club then it is not necessarily the roster that is at fault if you make a mistake. This can also mean if you have a night shift coming up that you make sure you take the time rostered off in advance to prepare for that shift and no doubt Phillippa covered some of the information around this in her talk yesterday.

You work in an industry that delivers services 24/7 and for some of you this will mean rostering cover for 24/7 so what are the main things to bear in mind when writing a roster:-

1. The length of the shift, there is a reason collective agreements include triggers for overtime after working 8 hours. It is agreed and accepted that ordinary hours are 8 per day Monday to Friday. It is acknowledged that after having worked 8 hours there is a fatigue risk that goes up the longer you work.
2. On call should be treated in the same manner as on duty particularly as in effect on call is the same as overtime – you have worked a day shift and then go on call. Do not be fooled into positions that somehow on call has no fatigue associated with it because you are at home or asleep. As anyone who has worked on call can verify sleep whilst on call is not the same as normal. Most collectives that have on call shifts overnight include provisions for adequate break time before returning to work

3. The quantity of recovery time between shifts. Most collective agreements include a minimum break time other than those that only work ordinary hours Monday to Friday
4. The timing of a shift which is sometimes also referred to as unsocial hours or work/life balance which is not to be underestimated. Weekends are different from weekdays and even if you work 5 days a week but some of those days are weekend days you should still be remunerated at a higher level for those days. Family life and social life has a value and should be recognised as such. This also has a health and safety factor as whilst you may not be fatigued there are health factors associated with spending time with loved ones.
5. The number of consecutive days. Most collectives include a provision around the total number of days that can be rostered in a row or the total number in a 7 day period for example with a specified length of time to be rostered off. This should include on call shifts and should be varied if those consecutive shifts include hours outside of ordinary
6. Rostering rules should also provide for sufficient time to get home
7. Moving shift types. Interestingly moving forward in a shift change has less fatigue associated with it i.e. if you are moving from an day to a night shift is better than moving from nights back to days.

So what are the ideals:-

- If on call overnight and called then a 9 hour break before returning to work and not following by a late or afternoon shift
- Limits on the frequency of shifts outside of ordinary hours eg 1 in 3 weekends, one long day in 7 etc
- Limits on the frequency of on call shifts eg 1 in 4 consecutive days
- Maximum 5 days in 7 with 48 consecutive hours rostered off
- On duty no longer than 8 hours which should apply to night shifts also however there can be measures put in place to address the length of nights such as ensuring sleep can be had but these have to genuinely be possible not just every now and then. As a side note napping at work should be encouraged where possible particularly when on a long day or nights. Do not accept the “if we are paying you to be here you have to be working”
- Three recovery sleeps after a set of four nights, 2 sleeps after 2 consecutive nights. After three it is a little less clear but you would expect 3 recovery sleeps unless there are opportunities for sleep whilst on nights. If going for 2 recovery sleeps post nights we would suggest a trial and sleep diaries be kept. We would also want to know what the sleep arrangements were – quiet room, beds etc.
- On call treated the same as on duty
- Just thinking about the amount of time a staff member spends at work is insufficient, there needs to be sufficient personal and recuperative time

- Maximum number of night shifts eg no more than 4
- As fewer shift changes as possible
- One work period in 24 hours – no split shifts

When writing a roster:-

1. Do not be constrained by the numbers you have already
2. Start with putting in the nights and weekends and long days etc and then work back from there
3. Don't forget leave cover if that needs to be rostered