



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST

Request No: AD-IG-01(2)-2017-2
Key Word: Patient Care Service
Subject: Management of Meal Breaks

Request: **Date Received:** 19/01/2017
 Date of Monitoring: 20/01/2017
 Date of Response: 17/02/2017

Thank you for your request for information received on 19 January 2017 and which was dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. We would also inform you that Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Health and Social Care Trust has now completed its search for the information you requested and which is detailed below for your attention

Question 1

Can the policy regarding the correct management of meal breaks for PCS staff be outlined. I wish clarification on the timeframe in which PCS staff should be allocated their 1st and 2nd meal breaks during a 12hr shift.

Answer 1

PCS crews are entitled to a ½ hour unpaid meal break. This for a 7½ hour shift. Agenda for Change Terms and Conditions state the meal break should be between the hours of 12midday and 2.00pm. However due to shift pattern variance it is recommended by management and staff side that a meal break should commence between the 3rd and 5th hour of the associated shift pattern. The same pattern above is applicable for a 12 hour shift, however, there is a 2nd meal that occurs between the 8th and 10th hour of the shift

Due to the nature of the differing requirements of PCS work the decision for when a meal break is taken is best managed by liaison between the PCS crew and NEAC Control room, so that it offers flexibility for patients being ready at different times and for PCS crews to have some autonomy over their workload.

There is no formal policy in relation to PCS Meal breaks.

Question 2

Clarification would also be appreciated on who is responsible for when the staff take their meal break e.g. is it the controller or the crew ultimately responsible for when the crew go on break?

Answer 2

Ultimately the Control Officer within the NEAC is responsible for planning and managing a PCS crew workload to allow time for a rest period. If a crew has a preference that can be accommodated then the Control Officer would endeavour to facilitate this. The NEAC room always endeavours to work with PCS crew to ensure this occurs.



Question 3

Also clarification on whether PCS staff can be ordered to take a meal break out of their base station, bearing in mind that PCS staff have unpaid meal breaks and during an unpaid meal break their time is their own.

Answer 3

They can be advised to take their meal breaks out of their base station. The planned nature and frequent long distances involved mean this is custom and practice. When on their break their time is their own. Locations acceptable for NIAS personnel to take a break in include NIAS Stations, NIAS Deployment Points and HSC facilities.

Question 4

I wish any provisions to be outlined in the event of unavoidable late/missed meals? Eg: are PCS staff entitled to claim for a missed meal AND be entitled to be stood down for a specified length of time at their base station in order to have food?

Answer 4

If a PCS crew works through a rest period they are paid half an hours overtime as this was unpaid time. If they get a half hour meal break thereafter they do not get paid. Meal breaks cannot be allocated at the start or finish of a shift.

Question 5

I am also aware of a pilot scheme regarding meals out of station for A&E staff and I am seeking clarification on NIAS equality policy regarding why PCS staff have not been included in this.

Answer 5

The PCS crews and A&E crews have differing Agenda for Change Terms and Conditions and the roles and workflows are different. The nature of PCS work is fundamentally more planned and there is no requirement to change normal working practices so this is not an equality issue – it is a terms and conditions issue.

I hope the above fully assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible, or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter. Please note that, under the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations, if you wish to publish or otherwise use this information besides for your own means, you will need to seek our permission to do so.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to the Finance and ICT Director, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) HSC Trust, Site 30, Knockbracken Healthcare Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast, BT8 8SG.

If following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision maker, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the Trust has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Website: ni@ico.org.uk
Post: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF
Telephone: 028 9027 8757 or 0303 123 1114 (Belfast based Office)

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion. Please be advised that NIAS replies under Freedom of Information may be released into the public domain via our website @ <http://www.niamb.co.uk>. Personal details in respect of your request will have, where applicable, been removed to protect confidentiality.

Yours sincerely

Alison Vitty

Alison Vitty (Miss)
CORPORATE MANAGER