

School of General Practice in the West Midlands

Study Leave during GP Training

Dear all,

I have been asked for a consensus statement on the value and availability of Personal Study prior to AKT and CSA/RCA examinations. Obviously both these exams are clinically focussed and not solely knowledge based exams but instead looking at the application of knowledge in a clinical setting.

There has been some disparity around the country over the acceptability of Private Study Leave. This is the stance of the GP School in the West Midlands:

Study Leave:

A trainee is entitled to 30 days of study leave per year (or for LTFT trainees the whole time equivalent) but this total also includes the Educational Release Days (Half-Day Release or VTS sessions) which in the West Midlands should be equivalent to at least 12 days (24 half days). These Educational Release Days should be reflected on in your learning log entries added to your portfolio in common with all study leave.

This leaves up to 18 days for additional study leave that is available to be taken each training year. It is not transferable between training years.

Most of this would previously have been used attending conferences and courses but under the current Covid restrictions most of these are on-line. Taking study leave for attendance for on-line conferences and appropriate courses is permitted and falls with normal study leave rules.

Education Time:

In a hospital attachment, Trusts are now encouraged to provide or allow at least 2 hours of educational time. This is in addition to any study leave.

In General Practice, there should be 3 sessions of education time each week ie 12 hours. The working week in GP should include 7 clinical sessions, 3 non-clinical sessions ie 12 hours a week, which are usually 1 session Educational Half-Day-Release (or Cluster Session), structured learning (tutorials/discussion groups/SEA meetings) and 1 session of self-directive study (including any portfolio work).

It is unrealistic to expect 4 hours a week private study to be sufficient to allow any trainee to obtain sufficient knowledge and understanding to achieve the MRCGP at the end of 3 years.

Additional study will need to be undertaken in a trainee's own time in keeping with all Postgraduate Professional Qualifications in any medical or other career.

Personal Study Time:

The GP School feels strongly that the best preparation for AKT and CSA/RCA examinations is the reflection on clinical experience to identify knowledge and skills gaps and then to plug the gaps.

Preparation for AKT should start early with educational needs being identified and remedied. Practicing AKT question banks will not in itself get any trainee through the AKT exam. The important aspect is the identification of learning needs and subsequent action to meet these needs.

Seeing patients allows time to develop and practice different consultation techniques, developing different ways of explaining problems or treatments and also adapting the skills to communicate effectively with different types of patients. Even though you can read about consultation models and techniques, there is no better way of preparing for the RCA/CSA than by seeing patients, recording consultations and receiving feedback. Again give yourself enough time to allow for practicing

In order to support this preparation, the GP School will permit a maximum of 5 days of the study leave allocation be used for private study and examination preparation each year. This should be used sensibly in good time for maximal effect.

Taking time off immediately before an exam is probably ineffective; too little and too late. Normal Trust or Practice procedures should be followed in requesting study leave. There should also be an acknowledgement that on certain days or weeks, other workforce pressures may restrict the ability of the host organisation to grant study leave.

Examination Leave:

A trainee may need a day off to ensure that they can travel and sit any examination. If the CSA examination returns and trainees are required to travel to London, then 2 days may be needed around the CSA examination. Exam leave is separate to study leave.

Some trainees may request a day of study leave before an exam to allow some headspace. Taking a critical career changing examination can be extremely stressful and so any request should be judged sympathetically. If it can be accommodated then it would not be an inappropriate request.

Taking weeks off as holiday or study leave prior to an exam is not appropriate and should not be approved. Everyone needs a holiday for their own wellbeing and not for revision.

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