

Protected Learning Time Policy and Process for Primary Medical Services

Introduction

Protected Learning Time (PLT) are sessions for GPs, Registered nurses, healthcare assistants, admin/reception staff and allied health professionals. Some of these may take place during core hours, which are recognised as Monday – Friday, 08:00-18:30 excluding Bank Holidays.

Government recommendations have encouraged primary care teams to make time to hold PLTs together in order to improve both team working and the quality of care for patients. They provide opportunities for healthcare professionals to learn about new clinical developments, updates to national guidance, best practice, whilst also sharing their own experience and knowledge with their peers. Fundamentally, PLT is about improving patient care by providing a dedicated learning time for healthcare professionals away from their busy day-to-day primary care work. For Practices as a whole, it is an essential means for building relationships, keeping teams updated and engaged.

Historically across North East London (NEL) there have been various requirements for agreeing a GP Practice's request to close for PLT. The ICB must be assured that there are suitable alternative arrangements for patients to access services during a full practice learning event and that requirements are consistent across NEL.

This policy aims to:

- ensure patients can access services
- provide assurance to the ICB regarding cover arrangements
- provide a single standardised set of requirements for all NEL practices
- provide a standardised process for all NEL practices
- ensure equality for all NEL practices

Protected Learning Time (practice-level events)

To ensure the requirements are consistent across NEL, the following principles have been developed to allow GPs and practice staff to attend Protected Learning Time.

1. Practices must provide services at such times (within core hours) that meet the reasonable needs of patients – and practices should be able to evidence this through proactive engagement with patients around the services delivered at specific times.

2. Practices, as part of the Primary Care Network DES, are not permitted to be fully closed for half a day on a weekly basis, except with prior approval from the ICB given in extenuating circumstances.
3. Practices must have in place arrangements for patients to access services throughout core hours in case of urgent need.
4. Protected Learning Time does not alter the above contractual requirements – therefore, practices must not alter their services or the times they are provided, to account for protected learning time.
5. No practice should be closing completely for Protected Learning Time, except where the ICB has approved practice closure for a full practice learning event (see ‘full practice learning events below’).
6. Given patient demand for general practice services, the ICB’s interpretation of the times and services that meet the reasonable needs of patients is that as a minimum, patients must be able to:
 - a. access reception services via telephone or face to face (walk-in) during all core hours
 - b. collect/order a prescription
 - c. access appointments / advice as clinically necessary
 - d. receive home visits where clinically necessary

Full Practice Learning Events

Practices are able to apply to the ICB for full practice closure which allows the whole practice team to do an education event together.

The duration of the closure will be considered against other practice closure PLE requests, ensuring equality across practices and appropriateness for patient access to care.

Where approved, practices must ensure cover arrangements are in place that would deliver the services the practice would normally provide at that time, including access to the full patient records, and clinical and non-clinical cover. The practice must inform patients and other stakeholders of the cover arrangements in advance.

Approval must be obtained by the ICB by following the process below:

1. Inform the relevant Place team at least 8 weeks prior to the event(s) for consideration.
2. The practice completes the PLT pro forma. The completed pro-forma must be sent to the central primary care team a minimum of six weeks prior to the event using the email nelondonicb.nel-primarycare@nhs.net.
3. Where a practice has a series of events planned, a multi-event application can be made (bearing in mind that only one closure will be permitted per month).
4. The practice will be notified of the outcome within 10 working days from receipt of the application.

The ICB will monitor full practice closure applications and approvals on an ongoing basis, alongside other activity and patient experience data.

Borough-level Learning Events

Practices often choose to take part in co-ordinated Borough-level learning events, meaning multiple practices may attend the same event at the same time.

Where these are arranged/coordinated with or by the ICB, approval for practice closure will be assumed, and therefore additional approval will not be required through the above process.

Where Borough-level learning events are arranged without ICB involvement, all practices planning to attend the event can request approval collectively using a single pro-forma, with details entered for each practice.

Under no other circumstances should a practice close on a regular basis and without prior approval. All previous practice arrangements require ICB approval. Failure to do so will result in further contractual action.

PRO-FORMA: APPROVAL FOR COVER ARRANGEMENTS TO FACILITATE PRACTICE TEAM ATTENDING FULL PRACTICE LEARNING EVENTS

This pro-forma should be completed by a Practice seeking approval for its cover arrangements to facilitate the whole practice team attending a Full Practice Learning Event. The proposal will be considered in accordance with the NEL Protected Learning Time Policy.

a) PRACTICE DETAILS

Place	
Practice Name	
Practice Code	
PCN	
Name of Practice Lead/Contact	
Date of Application	

b) PROPOSAL

a) Please provide information concerning the nature of the event
b) Date(s) of event(s), time and duration
c) Who will be providing cover arrangements for the practice?
Please confirm the following: d) Patients be will able to book/cancel an appointment; request a prescription? <div style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></div> e) Clinical cover will be provided as appropriate to meet the needs of the patient, and if required, signposting to an appropriate service. <div style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></div> f) There is provision for the sub-contractor to have access to the full patient record on the clinical system. <div style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></div>

c) COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Describe how you will inform patients and other stakeholders of these arrangements

Date:

Completed by:

Please Note: The completed pro-forma should be returned to the central primary care team a minimum of six weeks prior to the event email to nelondonicb.nel-primarycare@nhs.net.

The practice will be notified of the outcome within 10 working days from receipt of the application.