

POSITION STATEMENT REGARDING ON-CALL FREQUENCY

General surgeons provide essential surgical services across the country. They are in the front line of trauma care and provide care for the sickest surgical patients in general hospitals. These duties frequently require excessive demands on the surgeons' time. The Canadian Association of General Surgeons believes that Canadians should have reasonable access to the services of certified General Surgeons. These surgeons must have sufficient time free of surgical duties for maintenance of competence, other medical responsibilities, rest, family, as well as other non-medical obligations and interests. This is essential for physician well-being and in the long run safe and efficient patient care.

The Canadian Association of General Surgeons has endorsed a maximum of one in five night call system in a well-developed general surgical service. However, CAGS recognizes that this may not always be possible.

1. Upon recruitment the scope and breadth of duties, as well as the timing of on call schedules, should be agreed upon between the hospital and the general surgeon. This should be reviewed periodically.
2. No surgeon can be expected to provide continuous call or more frequent call than is compatible with safe patient care and the surgeon's personal well-being.
3. It is the responsibility and right of a surgeon to state when he/she is incapable of providing safe on call coverage.
4. It is the responsibility and obligation of Hospital Boards to provide a level of staffing which allows for sufficient off call time. On call duties require adequate access to elective OR time.
5. Call systems should recognize that due to age or ill health, surgeons may be less able to provide a high frequency of call and this should be recognized in physician resource planning.