

Sydney Health Care Interpreter Service USCC Minutes

Dear Member,

Please find attached the minutes of the recent Union-Specific Consultative Committee (USCC) meeting for Sydney Health Care Interpreter Service, held 11 April 2019.

Please direct any comments or feedback regarding these minutes to your HSU Organiser Denise O'Shaughnessy via email denise.oshaughnessy@hsu.asn.au by Monday 10 June.

The next USCC meeting will be held 11 June 2019.

In unity,



Gerard Hayes
Secretary, HSU NSW/ACT/QLD

Executive Boardroom, Level 5 - RPA Hospital

Attendees: Shirley Chea, Renee Moreton, Denise OShaughnessy, Vesna Dragoje, Luke Maroney, Carla Knox, Marlis Walther, Mouhib Akoury, Ann Nguyen, Fen Tsai, Hua Feng, Adriana Katris

Meeting commenced: 3:16 pm

Agenda Items

1. Results of the after -hours staff availability survey

Shirley: After hours staff availability survey. Reached out to all staff seeking availability re: working after hours (survey)

Denise: Survey – queried whether or not there is a policy regarding working after hours.

Shirley: No policy.

Denise: Eventually need to have a policy so when someone comes into service so that it is clear. On call roster? Paid on call hours.

Shirley: More than happy to flesh out these issues. Expectation is that if staff member is required to do on call they will be compensated.

Vesna: If commencing before 8 – paid overtime. Come in on Saturday or Sunday paid overtime.

Luke: Systematic on call roster – not something that is in place. Adhoc calling system. Merit in on call roster.

Shirley: Looking into a system that will work for staff and the service and will be doing that in consultation with HSU however, nothing solid developed at this time. Look at doing this next quarter.

Denise: Concerned with timeline. Dragging this out. Bidding war for jobs. Not being compensated for making themselves available after hours.

Vesna: Clarification around what is meant by 'made available' is that they are compensated whilst waiting to be called in.

Luke: On call clarification if they are called or not. If they are not the designated on call person who has been holding themselves on call then this needs to be formalised so they can be compensated accordingly.

Vesna: We provide services in 84 different languages so not aware of what language would be required.

Luke: One allocated on call person means that less employees lives affected due to being on call.

Vesna: Concern that one person cannot cover multiple facilities at one time.

Denise: Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic highly demanded languages. Would make sense to have some of these on call roster. After hours look at what the demand is and roster people who have said yes I am willing to provide afterhours service, roster them and pay an on call allowance.

Shirley: Essentially as we don't know what type of languages are required we are happy to look at data (6-12 months) to establish trend and put together a draft proposal on something that could be workable for everyone. Look at higher and secondary required languages. Proposing 3 months to gather data and put together a draft model.

Denise: Get the data within the month. Vesna would have a good idea as well as sector managers of the in demand languages.

Shirley: As we don't know the other languages in demand we would need time to put together a draft model of the other languages we have.

Denise: 3 months is too long. Re-convene with data one month to six weeks maximum.

Luke: Queried what kind of data is kept on the languages in demand. Why would it take 3 months to collate the data.

Shirley: Not collating the data that is time consuming. We can run reports. Being able to share some sort of draft proposal will take time. Pulling the data, performing an analysis and putting together a draft model for the staff.

Luke: Pure numbers. Reporting should not take a long amount of time.

Denise: Surely reporting would play a part in the demand for what languages are required to be rostered.

Shirley: No longer speaking about data. We need to now put together a model and a roster.

Denise: I would expect that the managers of the interpreting service can throw something together quickly.

Shirley: Given Easter period and pre-planned leave, let's put down a date now for 8 weeks' time.

Denise: Meet again in beginning of June however, in that period of time our members are still being required to be available.

Vesna: With the roster, people who put themselves on the roster have committed themselves for a whole weekend. If a job comes up then they will be called. Our staff cover 20 different languages, all up we cover according to our MPSP report – 84 different languages. Majority of our interpreters stated that they did not like the roster system as they didn't want to commit.

With the invitation system they have free will to accept or decline. They can choose to ignore the SMS invitation. They are paid approved overtime rates (receive 4 hours payment on Saturday and double that on a Sunday for what could be a 15 minute job). Majority of our weekend work lately has not been Arabic. Some Chinese. We have Thai, Vietnamese etc. rarely have booked appointments for the weekend. Post-natal sometimes but we usually have those booked in advance. All others are out of the blue e.g. ED and mental health ED, ICU & delivery. Telephone interpreters high in demand.

Award does not allow for our staff interpreters to do any phone interpreting. To have people on a list and paying on call and overtime we would find ourselves not using those people. Funding issues – financial problem. Other issue is that we are asking people to commit but may not be using their services. Top demand languages during the week are not necessarily top demand languages during the weekend. Top priority is providing a service when it is needed.

Luke: Difference between people who have put themselves down to be on call and those who have not.

Vesna: We had a roster previously and found that many interpreters were complaining about the on call rosters and were not happy with this. That's why we reviewed the process. 70-80% of my staff saying I would like to do overtime but not commit myself for the whole weekend. 3 people had earned more than 50% of all overtime for the whole year. I have 48 staff. Review resulted in less overtime.

Denise: What about increase in sessionals being used?

Renee: Staff cannot deliver phone service.

Vesna: Asked HSU to review to advise whether or not we can use staff to deliver phone service. Looking at most common languages Arabic is not for the weekend. Chinese is in high demand.

Denise: I don't know what amount of other languages you have. How many Thai interpreters do you have?

Vesna: One.

Denise: Then you cannot roster that person on every day of the year.

Vesna: But how when the invitation doesn't go out to them and they can't attend?

Shirley: That's why I have suggested let's look at the data and then look at the model and sort out a way forward that works for everyone. No magic fix but the process that Vesna mentioned has been in place since July 2018.

Denise: But you did say you have had a roster for 20 years.

Shirley: For your benefit Luke, Vesna has explained the previous circumstances surrounding the roster.

Vesna: Two points that are important: staff brought it up that they weren't happy. Staff are now happy with the process. If we are now supporting our staff and have a healthy and happy service then why would we be changing the system?

Shirley: That has been the feedback.

Vesna: My door is always open to staff. That is the feedback we get. Not via survey.

Denise: Compared to professions it is an unusual system. The problem is as I see it, people are wanting extra work but are having to watch their phones and bid for the overtime.

Shirley: I don't think it's a bidding system.

Denise: And people are not being paid for their overtime.

Hua Feng: When you talk about fairness, if its Chinese and we are busy we have 8 jobs lined up and half an hour lunch time but other languages might have 3. When you say about how to decide who to invite on the job sometimes we get invitations and sometimes we do not. Sometimes we are quick to reply and sometimes we are not.

Vesna: Can I just add to that as you are the highest earner of overtime in the last 6 months so you are receiving those invitations. Invitations are sent to staff and then to sessionals.

Hua Feng: I am asking how is the system set up to extend invitations. It's because we are Chinese and this is the busiest language.

Vesna: Our Chinese interpreters also get invitations so you are not the only one however, for the last 6 months you are the highest overtime earner.

Luke: Not appropriate in this meeting to share that sort of information. The point being made is that it is not transparent how they are being assigned work.

Shirley: 8 weeks agreed on to reconvene and look at draft proposal.

2. SLHD policy on the allocation of overtime

Shirley: SLHD policy on the allocation of overtime. We adhere to this. Adherence to policy for 30 minute lunch break. Vesna has talked to the fact that it is an expectation of the sector managers to manage their staff to adhere to that.

3. Adherence to Award provision for 20 minute paid break and 30 minute lunch break.

Denise: I presume it has something to do with the way the bookings are allocated. What I am hearing from members is that there is not adequate time given between appointments or travel to be able to have the break. This comes back to the service centre and the way that they are allocating the jobs and the estimation of the time of the job, parking etc. I believe Vesna was going to do some work with the staff to look at this.

Vesna: We have employed 2 new service centre staff, they are attending training one on one with the operations manager. We are looking at the way we have been allocating jobs so that one person can do the same job for the same week so they can follow up things in the following days. It has always been the case that we have asked sector managers to look at the jobs the staff have preferable the day before. We have also asked interpreters to take responsibility to look at the job and to communicate if they anticipate there could be a problem on any particular day. If on the day we can also manage it. We support all staff to have their breaks.

Example given of Chinese interpreter who had one appointment removed the morning due to no lunch break. Appointment given to sessional therefore, interpreter had over an hour in between appointment.

Denise: Is there a process clear to all staff that they can do that?

Vesna: Yes. Service centre staff know they should be giving time from one venue to another and that staff should also take that responsibility to communicate if they are unable to have a lunch break. Staff need to communicate the need for a break.

Denise: Is the process is that you contact your sector manager or the service centre?

Hua Feng: I usually speak to my manager or text the service centre.

Shirley: More of a communication issue than a lack of process. It is an expectation you call the sector manager in the first instance when you have an issue.

3. Allowance for travelling time, including time to locate parking space.

Mouhib Akoury: What Vesna said is right that we should be supporting the staff to have time to have lunch and have a break. They try their best to ensure that there is enough travelling time and staff to eat. The experience and is likely a logistics issue. Sometimes appointments

get moved around so that they can have their lunch but then they get moved back again quietly and they do not consult with the managers.

Shirley: How many times does that happen?

Fen Tsai: Frequently. Last week twice. I notice other interpreters not having a lunch break as well.

Referred to example of not having enough time to go to lunch and come back.

Vesna: Marlis, changed it twice and it was changed back?

Shirley: Process in place. But you sometimes just manage it because you don't want to contact the sector manager?

Hua Feng & Fen Tsai: Yes.

Marlis: If we fix something but things get changed the next day then you need to tell us. If things get changed the same day then that is also hard for the service centre.

Renee: 30,000 apps in 6 month period. There is a process in place at 3 levels. I think that it is the sector managers' job to support you and you need to continue to contact them for support to ensure that they can follow the process to assist you. Maybe for the next month we can track this so we can understand it better and implement some processes in the service centre to minimise this happening.

Vesna: Management team will be getting together to brainstorm workable solutions to fix the issues.

Renee: In the meantime, keep following the process and tell us so we can change it if needed.

Hua Feng: We don't have time to keep texting her to tell her.

Renee: If you check in the morning and see something different to the day before then let the manager know.

Fen Tsai: Booking clerks should be aware that they need to book us enough time to travel and have lunch.

Renee: If it is not working in the service centre then it is the service manager's job to resolve this. What would be useful is to have some concrete examples so we can start to work with the sector managers to resolve these issues.

Mouhib Akoury: Trying a system where the word lunch is typed into appointments so that no appointments can be made at the same time. Proven that it isn't possible for the booking clerk to remember that the interpreter needs to have a lunch break whilst meeting the requirements of the calls.

Renee: Include the lunch note in the brainstorm. We have new staff and new training.

Shirley: Clarification on the times of the breaks as per the award. Process is in place then from time to time if there are issues we can manage them via this. Contact the sector manager as it is an expectation that they sort it out. If you feel that you don't want to bother them than you are doing the wrong thing.

4. Backfill for Long Service Leave and Annual Leave by locum staff

Shirley: LSLA/L backfill. Basically put out an EOI for LSL/AL. If internal staff are not interested or do not take interest then we need to look at other options.

Denise: Part timer's backfilling?

Shirley: If we have people going on LSL for 2 years for example, we need to backfill the vacancies.

Denise: If you have permanently employed interpreters going on extended leave do you backfill?

Vesna: Yes. Currently have an EOI out for backfill.

5. Recruitment of permanent staff for high demand languages

Vesna: We have gone to market 4 times and have been unsuccessful to employ permanent staff.

Shirley: Reasoning behind it being so hard to employ interpreters is that they are paid more off our books, qualifications they are required to have.

Vesna: Yes there are qualification issues.

Renee: We need to look at career pathways for interpreters.

Luke: Acknowledgement that SLHD one of the few facilities that does have permanent interpreters.

Renee: Acknowledgement of the overall experiences of the interpreters across SLHD seeing all of the facets of NSW Health. Marketing strategy for recruitment.

Denise: Marketing in community, social media etc.

Vesna: We do that currently. Taking part in research and other LHD'S etc. out there on many different levels. Majority of all of our work is done by our staff. Demand is so high that using our staff, sessional and agencies we cannot provide for all of the appointments.

Denise: What do you do when you cannot provide the service?

Vesna: If we are unable to then we cannot provide at all. No alternate service. Looking into video conferencing. We do not ignore one single problem.

Denise: Issue about obtaining consent from patients. I believe this should take place face to face however, this is sometimes being done over the phone.

Luke: Preference is face to face.

Vesna: Preference is face to face however, we cannot always do that.

Denise: Do you have a policy or a process when doing it over the phone that they give a preference to say I would rather do this face to face.

Luke: Up to the practitioner. Their responsibility for consent.

6. New Business

1. Parking Reimbursement

Denise: Reimbursement of parking costs is still an issue as people are waiting 3 months for reimbursement. Petty cash claims should be same day unless more than \$50.

Renee: Made sure that all staff are set up as vendors in the system to speed up the process for reimbursement.

Denise: It sounds like the strategy implemented to make everyone a vendor is working.

2. Working hours

Hua Feng: Commencing before 830 am?

Vesna: No issue with the staff member doing it as long as they can continue with their normal work. Also not minimising the time of the clinics/appointments as we need to work together with them.

Denise: Suggestion for the issues being raised re: communication to raised externally and raised to sector manager and/or Vesna.

Shirley: In closing, these operational issues should be addressed in a team meeting. I am interested in discussing issues that impact the group as a whole not just for one individual. Can I suggest in future we do just that.

Denise: Agreed. We just need to continue to ensure the communication lines are clear.

Shirley: Will send Denise a calendar invite.

Meeting closed 4:34 pm.