

CME and Covid restrictions - an ASMS discussion paper

Traditionally, a significant portion of CME funds covers your travel to meetings, conferences, research, and health care facilities outside New Zealand, as well as helping to fund sabbaticals and secondments. While virtual participation in some international meetings is still achievable, we acknowledge that flexibility in applying the CME clause while Covid restrictions remain in place is helpful.

We acknowledge that CME is still an important aspect of SMOs' obligations to stay up to date and to maintain annual practising certificates.

This document is intended to promote discussion, and to support appropriate use of CME leave and funds during the Covid-era. As ever, we strongly advise you to ensure your CME leave plans are agreed before you go. This ensures timely reimbursement of your actual and reasonable expenses.

Options for CME use

1. Continued application to IT for use in professional learning and development (e.g. smartphones, tablets, laptops, and related equipment, such as headphones, screens, microphones, cameras, etc.) to enable optimal online participation in meetings, conferences, courses, etc.
 - a. Existing caps on IT expenditure should be reviewed upwards, or abandoned, with a view to supporting this.
 - b. IT equipment for use at home to facilitate CME participation, as above.
 - c. NB – 'tools of the trade' should be supplied by the employer, not via this CME provision.
2. Application of CME funds to enable a whole of team or whole of department CME activity, which may include a group of SMOs and, as appropriate, other clinical colleagues.
3. A group of colleagues might choose to stay together during an online conference, so they can engage in some face-to-face networking and conversation, to supplement the online experience. This would require booking a NZ venue to support this approach.
4. As travel restrictions lift, consider bringing a speaker to New Zealand to conduct courses, lectures, etc., as an alternative to sending many individuals overseas.
5. Ensure that CME leave is applied to support participation in and recovery time from virtual meetings held overnight.
6. Subscriptions to journals and distance learning.
7. Promote local courses and qualifications, including to specialist scope, te reo and tikanga Māori, leadership, and management. That is, ensure that CME is broadly interpreted to allow development of broad skills and practice.¹ We also remind you to sabbaticals now include working/volunteering for a medical charity as an approved component.

¹ MCNZ standards: good medical practice, medical care and prescribing, communication and consent, cultural safety, conduct and professionalism <https://www.mcnz.org.nz/our-standards/current-standards/>

8. We note that as vaccines become available and overseas travel restrictions are relaxed members may wish to resume CME travel. We do not expect that compulsory isolation/quarantine on return from CME or other leave would be covered by the existing clause. If remote work is possible and agreed, this could be undertaken during quarantine. Otherwise, annual leave is the most likely arrangement for MIQ.

Secondments

There are also other options available to support SMO/SDOs to utilise CME. The secondments clause is relatively under-utilised and is something CME funds can contribute to. The secondment clause enables you to: “apply for a secondment of two weeks every three years to a recognised unit or posting for the purpose of professional development and upgrading skills which are relevant to [your] duties and responsibilities.”

There are a number of units and postings within NZ and in Australia and the Pacific (as borders re-open) which offer opportunities for individual professional learning and service development.

Extending CME accruals – and sabbaticals

We realise many of you will have adjusted your sabbatical timeframes and planning due to the Covid pandemic. We encourage services to take a supportive approach because during this period of non-overseas travel, more SMOs will meet the service requirements and become eligible to apply for a sabbatical. This means careful service planning needs to occur so that you and your colleagues are supported to access this important refreshment and professional learning provision. We also note point 7 (above) and its relevance to sabbaticals as well as to CME.

The Ministry of Health also offers sabbaticals (see December 2020 Specialist article for more information).

The ASMS MECA already provides for extending CME accruals to five years by agreement, supported by a professional learning plan. We particularly encourage use of this provision where a sabbatical is part of your 1-3-year professional learning picture.

Remember there should not be any requirement to cover a colleague’s sabbatical, unless your service has been recently and specifically job-sized to allow for internal sabbaticals cover.

If in doubt, or you need advice and support, contact your industrial officer.

Resumption of overseas travel

You will be aware that ASMS members are increasingly concerned with the carbon impact of air travel. Our recent annual conference directed ASMS to advocate for all DHBs to join Toitu Envirocare;² and the government has just announced a climate emergency, with the public service directed to be carbon neutral by 2025.³

² Toitu Envirocare www.toitu.co.nz – currently six DHBs are members (Hawke’s Bay, Waitemata, Canterbury, Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Capital & Coast)

³ Public Sector to be carbon neutral by 2025. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/public-sector-be-carbon-neutral-2025>

In some DHBs carbon emissions from air travel account for upwards of 40 percent of their carbon footprint. We encourage the thoughtful development of sustainable practices throughout the health sector, but we are not suggesting that all air travel must end. That said, we do encourage the following:

- Overseas trips, where required, are for a reasonable length of time and where possible incorporate more than one planned meeting, conference, unit visit, or posting.
- Travel includes carbon offsetting to approved NZ schemes.
- We continue to promote the combination of CME and annual leave. This is preferable to SMOs taking multiple flights over the course of the year and also provides rest and recreation, along with the professional learning and reflection gained through CME activities.