

Practical procedures for arranging medical visits to immigration detention centres

It is fundamental to good medical and medico-legal practice that doctors do not make a drama out of a crisis. It is difficult enough to get a coherent history from and examine a survivor of torture or other traumas without extraneous distractions from both medical and non-medical detention staff.

1. Under Detention Centre Rule 33:
(7) All detained persons shall be entitled to request that they are attended by a registered medical practitioner or dentist other than the medical practitioner or those consulted by him under paragraph (6), so long as—
(a) the detained person will pay any expense incurred;
(b) the manager is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for the request; and
(c) the attendance is in consultation with the medical practitioner.
(11) Subject to any directions given in the particular case by the Secretary of State, a registered medical practitioner selected by or on behalf of a detained person who is party to legal proceedings shall be afforded reasonable facilities for examining him in connection with the proceedings.
2. Visiting doctors must supply to the IRC, proof of medical registration and malpractice insurance before the visit. This is a required part of the process of booking of a visit.
3. On arrival at the centre the doctor must produce photo ID and proof of address.
4. It is good practice to call the detainee shortly before arriving in the centre to ensure that they will be taken to the examining room in good time. The doctor therefore needs a telephone number for the detainee, and where they are required, the interpreter.
5. The medical notes are often crucial to understanding the detainee's situation. The detainee should be invited to sign and deliver consent for healthcare to supply them to the doctor, which should be without charge. It is often useful to review these notes with the detainee.
6. Visits by independent doctors and review of the medical notes can reveal unmet medical needs. The GMC places duties on that doctor to inform and discuss concerns with the detainee's ordinary practitioners (who are employed in the IRC). These clinicians are not always available during the visit and so it is advisable that such communications should be in writing (by fax or email) to the doctor serving as medical manager for that facility.
7. It is rarely a good idea to make bookings on a Friday for the following week, or to visit on Monday, as these are often times of maximum

confusion in IDC healthcare.

8. Detention Service Orders (DSOs) allow a doctor to bring a laptop and a mobile phone or a camera into the examination room. See:
DSO 11/2007. Mobile phones for doctors in IRCs
DSO 08/2012: Use of cameras by medical practitioners.
9. The complexity of these arrangements are such that Forrest doctors require that all arrangements for our visits are handled by our administrator. However, it is helpful if the instructing solicitor is available by phone at the time of the visit, so that any issues which arise on the day can be resolved.

Further information can be found in a Protocol agreed with then head of detention services in 2006 and still in effect. See below.