

# Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) – Supplementary Guidance Note

## Continuing Medical Education-related Matters for Medical Specialists

### Overseas travel for Continuing Medical Education or Sabbatical Leave Purposes

Employers should express caution to Medical Specialists who have booked, are booking or are otherwise planning overseas travel for education or research purposes that while not required or initiated by the employer, would normally carry the imprimatur of or be funded (or reimbursed) by the employer. This includes travel for professional development (including Continuing Medical Education) or Sabbatical Leave purposes.

It is recommended that such travel be postponed, particularly if it is to – or requires transit through – a country identified by the Commonwealth Government as a ‘risk’ country.

The employer should work with the Medical Specialist to identify alternatives to that travel or to reschedule it for a time when the risks have reduced. The same risk assessment criteria mentioned above for work-related travel are applicable.

In some cases, the employer might refuse authorisation for the Medical Specialist to undertake such travel where the risks to the Medical Specialist and the organisation are deemed very high. No such decision should be made without consulting the Medical Specialist first and explaining the employer’s assessment of the risks involved.

Where an employer seeks to cancel an Medical Specialist’s travel for operational purposes – for example to ensure an appropriate complement of critical staff is maintained to address this unfolding health event – the employer should not cause disadvantage (financial or otherwise) to the Medical Specialist.

The Department of Health and Human Services, the Australian Medical Association/Australian Salaried Medical Officers’ Federation and the Victorian Hospitals Industrial Association will continue to review impacts on Continuing Medical Education Support and Leave in the context of the coronavirus. This will include consideration of possible broader carry-over of Continuing Medical Education Support ‘caps’. Further advice will follow.

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### What is the effect on a Medical Specialist’s Continuing Medical Education (CME) Support where an overseas conference (or similar) or Sabbatical Leave event is cancelled for coronavirus-related reasons?

Where a Medical Specialist had approval to undertake a CME-related activity involving overseas travel to or through a country or countries that were not listed on the Commonwealth Government’s Smart Traveller website as ‘do not travel’, ‘reconsider your need to travel’ or ‘exercise a high degree of caution’ in the context of the coronavirus at the time the travel was booked and paid for (in whole or part) and that travel has been cancelled – or approval to attend has been withdrawn – because of issues relating to the coronavirus:

- the Medical Specialist can be reimbursed by their employer for any amount they are out-of-pocket expense after all refunds from travel insurers, airlines, hotels, conference organisers, etc have been sought and obtained where those travel expenses would have formed part of a CME Support claim; and
- that reimbursement of the out-of-pocket amount will be drawn against the Medical Specialist’s CME Support cap for the 2019-20 financial year unless the Doctor has already made a claim for and been reimbursed for the costs incurred (except where the Doctor returns the reimbursed funds to the hospital); and

- the difference between the gross amount of eligible travel expenses incurred that could have been claimed as CME Support in 2019-20 will remain available within the Medical Specialist's CME Support cap for 2019-20 unless the Doctor has already made a claim for and been reimbursed for the costs incurred (except where the Doctor returns the reimbursed funds to the hospital); and
- that amount of CME Support, if not expended in the balance of 2019-20, can be carried over into 2020-21 (adding to the CME Support cap for that year) to be claimed only for overseas travel expenses in 2020-21 unless the Doctor has already made a claim for and been reimbursed for the costs incurred in 2019-20 (except where the Doctor returns the reimbursed funds to the hospital).

**What if the Medical Specialist had planned personal travel in combination with the CME-related travel, and/or was to be accompanied by a spouse, partner or family?**

Only those costs that would have been eligible to be claimed as CME Support will be reimbursed or treated as available CME Support in line with the above.

However, where the CME-related travel is cancelled at the direction of the hospital, the hospital will consult with the Doctor to ensure all circumstances are taken into account and disadvantage to the Doctor is avoided.

**What if the Medical Specialist booked or paid for travel after the country or countries they will travel to or through was listed on the Commonwealth Government's Smart Traveller website as 'do not travel', 'reconsider your need to travel' or 'exercise a high degree of caution' in the context of the coronavirus?**

Where a Medical Specialist has booked or paid (in whole or part) for travel to a 'risk' country after any destination or transit point was listed as a risk country there can be no carry over of CME Support in the way described above.

Any decision on reimbursement of out-of-pocket expense after cancellation refunds will be assessed by the employer on a case-by-case basis in consideration of all relevant circumstances.

**What happens to a Medical Specialist's Continuing Medical Education Leave where CME-related travel is cancelled?**

Clause 59.2(a) of the *AMA Victoria – Victorian Public Health Sector – Medical Specialists Enterprise Agreement 2018-2021* allows that a Medical Specialist may carry over their entitlement to Continuing Medical Education Leave from one year into another. This accumulation is to a maximum of four weeks leave or otherwise as approved by the hospital.

**What if a Medical Specialist books and pays for travel without consulting with the hospital to ensure that Continuing Medical Education or Sabbatical Leave will be granted for the period of travel?**

A Medical Specialist should not be booking and paying for travel at this time without first consulting with their hospital to ensure that Continuing Medical Education or Sabbatical Leave will be approved.