

GP at Sporting Events

GPs are often asked to provide medical assistance and advice at sporting events, ranging from assisting their child's local team, to a club team or senior team, to becoming involved in a large-scale sporting event. Often, GPs will agree to provide medical assistance at these sporting events, without due consideration for the level of exposure that may be involved. The pitch-side GP may face many challenges in managing the injuries and wellbeing of participants of all ages and fitness levels. For many GPs, such requests may form an integral part of their career or service within a local community and should be addressed formally.

This factsheet highlights matters to consider when asked to provide medical assistance at a sporting event and sets out the position relating to professional indemnity insurance under your policy arranged by Medisec and underwritten by MedPro.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Normal GP work only

As a GP, it is paramount that you have the appropriate level of medical indemnity insurance in place for the work you undertake. Your professional indemnity insurance cover arranged by Medisec and underwritten by MedPro, covers work within the range of professional services normally provided by a GP.

If requested to provide medical assistance/services at a sporting event, it is vital that you seek absolute clarity in advance as to the responsibilities, duties, and competencies for which you will be responsible at that event; these duties and responsibilities must come within the scope of normal GP practice. (*See further below under Duties and Responsibilities.*)

When providing medical assistance/ services at sporting events, even in a voluntary capacity, it is important to ensure that you have appropriate qualifications, skills, experience, equipment, and support to do so. The variety of incidents and injuries that may arise can vary from relatively minor cuts and bruises to concussion, spinal injury, facial injuries, cardiac arrest, and acute traumatic injury of a participant. It is important to consider the skills, equipment, paramedic support and timely specialist input required to manage such situations.

Our best practice recommendations are that GPs providing medical assistance/ services at sporting events should have either the ATLS or Pre-Hospital Trauma Course qualification and that they should attend a refresher course every three years.

Cover does not extend to act as an Event Doctor

It is important to be aware that the professional indemnity insurance policy arranged by Medisec covers GPs to provide medical assistance/ services at sporting events, provided the work undertaken is that of a GP and **not** as an Event Doctor, who is responsible for ensuring procedures are in place for the whole event, for example, crowd control, ambulance cover, provision of appropriate medical equipment etc.

Exclusion of liability assumed under agreement

You should also be aware that your professional indemnity insurance arranged through Medisec does not cover any liability that you may have assumed under any contract, agreement, warranty or guarantee which would not otherwise have attached. This means, for example, if you sign a contract agreeing to cover certain damages or losses, then your Medisec policy with MedPro would not step in to cover this.

Duties and responsibilities

The duty of care will depend mainly on the responsibilities and duties agreed upon, however, these can vary greatly. If GP services are requested by a particular team or organising body of a particular event, it is imperative that the GP ascertains specific information regarding the nature of the role, and the duties and responsibilities expected of the GP, before they agree to provide such medical services.

Some organisations may be quite advanced and professional, (whereas others may be more relaxed and quite difficult to formalise e.g. GP cover to the local underage GAA team.) However, regardless of the event, if acting as a GP at a sporting event, the GP's duty of care will extend to all participants and accordingly, their role, rights and responsibilities should be clearly defined at the outset.

As a GP providing medical assistance/ services to a sporting event or club you should consider the following key issues:

- Do the responsibilities and duties fall within the scope of normal GP practice? This is a key point when considering cover under your professional indemnity insurance policy arranged by Medisec.
- What is the level of responsibility required? Are you responsible for the participants and competitors only or are the spectators included?
- Are you being asked to act as the Event Doctor, i.e., are you responsible for ensuring the correct supports are in place for the whole event, e.g., in the event of emergencies, ambulance cover, crowd control, provision of appropriate medical equipment? Are you responsible for the planning and procedures, etc? If so, this activity would **not** be covered under your Medisec policy.
- Are you responsible for a medical team and / or delegation of activities to other persons?
- Have you carried out a risk assessment and agreed on equipment, ambulance, and personnel requirements, or is this somebody else's responsibility?
- Have you considered communication procedures / personnel? e.g. two-way radio systems. Are there any issues with mobile phone coverage / black spots?
- Does the event require knowledge of the events Critical Incident Plan and County's Major Emergency Plan?

The duty of care can vary greatly depending on the responsibilities and duties required, as can the exposure and the GP's indemnification requirements. As a doctor providing medical services at a sporting event, you should be aware of issues such as:

- the sport, its rules, the risks and potential injuries sustainable in that sport.
- how to deal with such injuries to participants in the pre-hospital setting.
- the policy around withdrawal and substitution of injured players.
- specific aspects of physique and fitness needed to safely participate at the appropriate level.
- the guidance published by the sporting association or professional body including being aware of the specific skills or qualifications required.
- where applicable, anti-doping codes relevant to that sport.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Travelling with teams outside the jurisdiction

Your professional indemnity policy arranged by Medisec does not give automatic cover outside the jurisdiction. The conditions for prior approval on a case-by-case basis are as follows:

1. Medisec should be notified at least one week in advance of the nature, timing, and location of the event.
2. The work being carried out is normal GP practice and is confined to the team members.
3. The GP has the appropriate training/skill/clinical competence and necessary equipment.

Ethical responsibilities

There are a number of potential ethical issues that may arise for a GP providing medical assistance/ services at a sporting event. GPs who are employed directly by a sporting organisation may feel they have dual obligations, to their employer and the sporting organisation and this could potentially lead to a conflict of interest. In ethical terms, as with any other context, doctors need to be aware that their primary responsibility is to their patients and the general principles of medical consent and confidentiality remain the same as if treating a patient in their GP practice.

- **Consent**

The general ethical and legal principles of consent apply to GPs providing medical services at sporting events and when treating players and spectators. All doctors should be aware of their ethical and legal obligations around obtaining patient consent from adults or on behalf of children, as outlined by the Medical Council's *Guide to Professional Conduct and Ethics for Registered Medical Practitioners*, 9th edition, 2024, ("the Ethical Guide"). (Please also see Medisec's factsheet on Consent to Medical Treatment available on our website).

GPs also need to consider Garda Vetting requirements when working with children. (Please also see Medisec's factsheet on Garda Vetting, available on our website.)

As with all other aspects of healthcare, a GP has an ethical obligation to obtain the patient's consent in advance of undertaking an examination or providing medical treatment. Consent can be verbal, written, or implied by the willing agreement of a person who understands what will be undertaken. Specific consent is also needed for the disclosure of confidential information to coaches or managers of a player.

In an emergency situation, or a 'Good Samaritan' situation, patient consent should be sought where feasible. The Ethical Guide states "*In an emergency situation it may not be possible to obtain consent from a patient. In such circumstances, you should ... provide such treatments as are immediately necessary to save the patient's life or prevent serious harm to their health, unless you are aware of a valid and applicable advance refusal of such treatment.*"

- **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is a fundamental principle of medical ethics and is central to the relationship of trust between patients and doctors. As with all aspects of healthcare, the principles of confidentiality are equally paramount when providing care to sports teams, clubs, or members of the public. The right to patient privacy must be protected and respected at all times. GPs should be aware of their professional obligations concerning confidentiality as outlined in chapter 3 of the Ethical Guide. (Please also see Medisec's factsheet on Confidentiality available on our website).

GPs should be cognisant that where information regarding a player is to be exchanged at multidisciplinary meetings, the player must be told, and consent should be obtained in advance to disclose any patient information.

- **Medical records**

Keeping good medical records is an essential component of safe and effective care and a requirement of most professional indemnity insurance policies, as they are heavily relied on in the event of a claim or a complaint, which often may arise several years after the incident occurs. Professional responsibilities for doctors relating to medical records are clearly set out at paragraph 38 of the Ethical Guide: -

“You must keep accurate and up-to-date medical records either on paper or in electronic form. These must be legible and clear and include the author, registration number, date and, where appropriate, the time of the entry and should be made contemporaneously in so far as possible. Retrospective notes are acceptable in circumstances where it was not possible for the doctor to record the notes at the time of the event. In these circumstances you must document:

- *That it is a retrospective entry.*
- *The date and/ or event that it relates to.*
- *The date/ time the retrospective note was made.”*

It is therefore important to keep an accurate record of all incidents, accidents, and any medical care provided, irrespective of how small or trivial the injury may seem. In some instances, care provided may be to a patient of your own practice and hence it is convenient to document the care given in the patient’s medical record. However, if the patient is not a regular patient of your practice, it is still important to record the care given, even in a private diary or a risk management file. This will act as an aide-memoire if required at a later date. It is also strongly recommended that you update the patient’s regular GP regarding any treatment provided for continuity of care purposes, unless the patient objects to you doing so. This is consistent with obligations under paragraph 33.9 of the Ethical Guide requiring doctors providing out of hours or telemedicine services to update the patient’s GP “as soon as possible and include such information as is necessary and appropriate to facilitate continuity of care.”

GPs should inform their indemnifier as soon as possible of any incidents or complaints resulting from their assistance or provision of medical services at a sporting event.

In conclusion, cover is in place under your professional indemnity insurance policy arranged by Medisec and underwritten by MedPro for providing medical assistance/services as a GP at sporting events, as per policy terms and conditions. Your policy covers you for these events, provided the work you are undertaking is that of a GP and **not** an Event Doctor who is responsible for ensuring procedures are in place for the whole event e.g. crowd control, ambulance cover, provision of appropriate medical equipment etc.

We advise that it is essential that you establish your duties and responsibilities with the event organisers before agreeing to provide medical assistance/ services at a sporting event. We also recommend members contact Medisec in advance of acting as a GP at a sporting event or if they intend to travel abroad with any professional or voluntary sporting organisation.

Please do not hesitate to contact Medisec if you have any queries in relation to the above.

The contents of this publication are indicative of current developments and contain guidance on general medico legal queries. It does not constitute and should not be relied upon as definitive legal, clinical or other advice and if you have any specific queries, please contact Medisec for advice.