



Australian Salaried Medical Officers'
Federation (New South Wales)

Level 3 Suite 46 330 Wattle Street Ultimo New South Wales 2007
Locked Mail Bag No 13 Glebe New South Wales 2037
Telephone: (02) 9212 6900 Facsimile: (02) 9212 6911
Email: asmof@asmof.org.au Website: www.asmfnsw.org.au

28 November 2017

Ms Elizabeth Koff
Secretary of Health
NSW Ministry of Health
Locked Mail Bag 961
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2059

Dear Ms Koff

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Elizabeth'.

Office Accommodation for Staff Specialists

We have recently been made aware of a number of hospitals in NSW seeking to make changes to existing office accommodation for Staff Specialists, specifically the reduction of office spaces provided to Staff Specialists in favour of an open plan environment.

This is arguably in breach of Clause 24 of the Staff Specialist (State) Award, which reads, "Staff Specialists will have access to such office, secretarial and administrative support as may be reasonably necessary to undertake the requirements of the position".

It is also in breach of Office Accommodation Policy - Public Health Organisations and Ambulance Service (PD 2005_576). This policy outlines the required spaces for office accommodation in all health care facilities and is required to be complied with by public health organisations and the Ambulance Service of NSW. Section 1.5 of the PD deals with the Required Workspaces and Section 1.5.1.4 prescribes the Office Type for Staff Specialists.

ASMOF categorically rejects open plan arrangements for Staff Specialists. It promotes the de-professionalisation of consultants, fundamentally limiting their ability to produce the work required and expected of them. In addition, it has significant adverse effects on the quality of training and supervision of JMOs.

ASMOF holds an unequivocally strong position on office accommodation standards for our members, and has produced a policy outlining nine minimum standards. These standards were provided to NSW Health in 2011.

ASMOF Recommended Minimum Office Accommodation Standards

There are nine recommended standards:

- i. All 0.6 to 1.0 FTE positions are to have their own office.
- ii. 0.1 to 0.5 FTE positions can be required to share an office. There may be situations that this may not be appropriate and should be dealt with on a

case by case basis. It would generally not be expected that more than two staff would be allocated to any one office.

- iii. Those positions that are subject to genuine job-sharing arrangements can also share an office.
- iv. Office space to be nine square metres for Staff Specialists and Clinical Academics.
- v. Positions that have managerial responsibilities attached (identified for example by the provision of a managerial allowance) or have roles that require similar consideration (such as for example Directors of Training) should have office space of at least 12 square metres.
- vi. The office is to be adjacent to service areas if physically possible.
- vii. Interview/meeting rooms should be nearby and reasonably accessible.
- viii. The office must be secure and lockable, along with being reasonably soundproof. It should be cleaned regularly and maintained to reasonable standards. The office layout must be to acceptable ergonomic standards.
- ix. The office must contain as a minimum a desk, chair, phone, network computer, lockable filing cabinets, and bookshelves. Ready access to a printer and photocopier would be expected. Shared offices should have sufficient allocation of office equipment/furniture for each staff member.

These standards were unanimously re-endorsed at the October 2017 meeting of the ASMOF NSW governing body, which passed the following motion:

"State Council opposes any attempts to change office accommodation standards for staff specialists which do not meet the ASMOF Recommended Minimum Office Accommodation Standards (Attachment C) and the requirements of the Staff Specialists (State) Award, which relevantly says that Staff Specialists will have access to such office, secretarial and administrative support as may be reasonably necessary to undertake the requirements of the position. Furthermore, ASMOF will fight any attempt to erode acceptable accommodation standards for Staff Specialists, including escalation to the NSW IRC if necessary."

ASMOF expects that these standards are supported and enforced by each health organisation and that Staff Specialists are provided with appropriate office accommodation. This should include all new developments and all redevelopments.

The international and Australian literature is clear. Open plan leads to:

- a reduction in productivity http://www.istor.org/stable/255498?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
- a reduction in acoustic privacy, which in turn leads to a doubling in loss of productivity due to noise distraction
- an increase in stress
- a reduction in the capacity to reason effectively and think creatively

- a great reduction in morale, with dissatisfaction and resentment
- an increase in a sense of helplessness
- an increase in sick leave (up to 62% more)
- more work to achieve a given result

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781119992592.ch6/summary>, and

- the more senior the staff the worse the effects to productivity
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/255498>

There are also numerous articles in the popular press warning against open plan, including:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/business/cubicles-rise-in-brave-new-world-of-publishing.html>
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2014/12/30/google-got-it-wrong-the-open-office-trend-is-destroying-the-workplace/?utm_term=.1df32ba583ee
- <http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-open-office-trap>
- <http://www.smh.com.au/small-business/managing/the-venture/are-open-plan-offices-insane-20150520-gh68jx.html>
- <http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/4112857.htm>
- CPA Australia has also written about the pitfalls of open plan
<https://www.intheblack.com/articles/2016/02/01/open-plan-offices-work-for-your-boss-but-not-for-you>

In accordance with the direction of the NSW State Council, ASMOF will fight any attempt to erode acceptable accommodation standards for Staff Specialists, including escalation to the NSW IRC if necessary.

I would greatly appreciate your bringing this position to the attention of all relevant Health-related entities including Health Infrastructure.

Yours sincerely



Dr Antony Sara
President
ASMOF NSW

28/4/17