

## Supervision and on-call hours

*This article is a translation from our website.*

**June 6, 2017**

The guide [Role and Responsibilities of the Learner and the Supervisor](#) was published in September 2016. This article is the fifth in a series of texts that will provide additional insight into the various aspects of the guide along with useful clarifications for learners in medicine, supervisors and those around them.

The role of supervisors is central to the excellence of training programs and patient safety. An entire section of the guide is devoted to them. This capsule will focus on the responsibility of assigning professional activities to a learner.

The supervisor must know the learner under his responsibility well. He must not only know what his learning objectives are and what stage he is at in his competency trajectory, but his limits and his capabilities too. This will allow him to adapt his teaching to his learner's needs but, most importantly, to ensure the safety of the patients that he assigns to him.

Since the supervisor is responsible at all times for the professional activities that he assigns to the learner, a conversation about the learner's limits and capabilities is crucial at the beginning of the rotation or at the beginning of on-call duty when the supervisor on call is not the rotation supervisor. During this conversation, methods of communication must also be discussed and agreed upon. The supervisor must remember that the learner is often not fully aware of the risks associated with certain medical acts or technical procedures assigned to him and that he is not necessarily able to judge his capabilities. The supervisor must also bear in mind that the learner may be reluctant to tell him about his limits. The supervisor must therefore put him sufficiently at ease and adapt his supervision accordingly. Depending on the terms of the discussion, supervision may be provided on site, directly in the same physical space, or remotely. At all times, a procedure for communication must be clearly established between the learner and his supervisor, and the latter must be diligent and make himself available for supervision. Expectations must be discussed by the learner and his supervisor. In general, the level of supervision will depend on the learner's level of autonomy. The supervisor must anticipate and avoid any risks associated with professional activities assigned to the less autonomous learner. Too often, situations reported to the Collège concern a level of supervision that is not appropriate for the learner's capabilities and the patient's needs. In addition to jeopardizing patient safety, the supervisor is putting the learner in a vulnerable position where he risks being the subject of a report.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to remind supervisors of the sections in the [Code of ethics of physicians](#) that refer to supervision during on-call hours:

S. 37: A physician must be diligent and display reasonable availability with respect to his patient and the patients for whom he accepts responsibility when he is on call.

S. 114: A physician must, in an emergency, assist a colleague or another health professional in the practice of his profession when the latter requests it.