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| **Policy Title** | After-Hours Care and Continuity of Care Policy |
| **Policy Category** | Clinical Governance / Patient Care |
| **Manual Reference** | Clinical Governance – Patient Care and Continuity |
| **Applies To** | All staff, independent contractor GPs, nurses and administrative personnel across Village Medical locations |
| **Related Standards** | RACGP Standards for general practices – 5th edition (GP1.3) |
| **Document Owner** | Practice Manager |
| **Approved By** | Practice Manager / Principal GP |
| **Effective Date** | November 2026 |
| **Review Date** | November 2027 |
| **Version** | 1.0 |

**1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure patients of Village Medical have access to appropriate medical care outside normal operating hours and during scheduled clinic closures.

Village Medical is committed to maintaining continuity of care, effective clinical communication, patient safety and timely follow-up through established external medical deputising arrangements and internal cross-site support.

**2. Policy Statement**

Village Medical provides patients with access to appropriate after-hours medical services through its nominated medical deputising provider, Hello Home Doctor.

Additional healthcare options, including Medicare Urgent Care Clinics and Healthdirect, are communicated to patients to support timely access to appropriate medical care when their usual general practitioner is unavailable.

Internal arrangements are maintained between Village Medical on Helen and Village Medical on Buronga Avenue to ensure patients continue to receive appropriate clinical and administrative support during scheduled closure periods.

These arrangements support patient access to appropriate medical services, clear clinical responsibilities, effective communication and timely follow-up.

**3. Commencement of Policy**

This policy takes effect from the approved commencement date and applies to all relevant staff and practitioners across Village Medical.

The policy will be reviewed annually or earlier where changes occur to service arrangements, operating hours, clinical staffing or relevant accreditation requirements.

**4. Scope**

This policy applies to all general practitioners, nursing staff, reception staff, administrative personnel and management across Village Medical.

It includes arrangements for after-hours medical care, scheduled clinic closures, redirected telephone calls, procedural follow-up, nursing support and clinical communication between practitioners and locations.

**5. After-Hours Medical Deputising Arrangements**

Village Medical engages Hello Home Doctor as its nominated medical deputising service for patients requiring non-emergency medical care outside normal clinic operating hours.
The service provides access to medical care during evenings, overnight periods, weekends and public holidays, subject to the provider's operating arrangements and service availability.
Patients are advised of the nominated deputising service through the practice's after-hours telephone messages and other relevant patient communication channels.
Patients experiencing a medical emergency are directed to telephone 000 or attend an appropriate emergency department.
The formal arrangement with Hello Home Doctor is maintained separately as part of Village Medical's accreditation and governance documentation.

**6. Village Medical on Helen – Scheduled Closure Arrangements**
Village Medical on Helen operates on an alternate-week consulting arrangement, with Dr Moheb Gayed providing skin cancer and procedural medicine services during scheduled consulting weeks.
During weeks when Village Medical on Helen is closed, incoming telephone calls are diverted to Village Medical on Buronga Avenue during normal operating hours.
Reception staff at Buronga Avenue manage redirected enquiries, assist patients with appointments and coordinate appropriate clinical follow-up.
Patients requiring medical review are directed to an available general practitioner or appropriate alternative service according to their clinical needs.
These arrangements ensure patients of Village Medical on Helen continue to have access to administrative assistance and appropriate clinical support during scheduled closure periods.
Outside normal operating hours, patients are directed to the nominated after-hours medical deputising service.

**7. Skin Cancer and Procedural Follow-Up**
Village Medical recognises the importance of continuity of care for patients undergoing skin cancer treatment, minor surgical procedures and associated post-procedural management.
During scheduled closure periods at Village Medical on Helen, an available general practitioner with experience in skin cancer medicine may provide clinical assessment and procedural follow-up where clinically appropriate.
Dr Moheb Gayed remains contactable by telephone during scheduled closure periods to provide clinical advice and assistance where required, particularly in relation to procedural complications, wound management and ongoing treatment considerations.
The supporting general practitioner may liaise directly with Dr Moheb Gayed to discuss clinical findings, procedural concerns and appropriate ongoing management.
Nursing staff at Village Medical on Buronga Avenue are also available to assist with wound assessments, dressing changes, suture removal and other appropriate post-procedural care.
Patients requiring urgent medical assessment are managed according to clinical urgency, with appropriate escalation or referral arranged where necessary.
Responsibility for clinical assessment, treatment decisions and documentation remains with the practitioner providing care at the time, with communication to Dr Moheb Gayed as appropriate to maintain continuity of care.

**8. Nursing Support and Wound Management**
Nursing staff at Village Medical on Buronga Avenue provide ongoing support for patients requiring post-procedural care following treatment at Village Medical on Helen.
This includes wound assessments, dressing changes, suture removal and other appropriate nursing interventions within their professional scope of practice.
Nursing staff ensure that all clinical interventions are documented in the patient's medical record.
Any concerns regarding wound healing, infection, bleeding or other complications are escalated to an available general practitioner for assessment.

Where appropriate, communication may also occur with Dr Moheb Gayed to support ongoing clinical management.

**9. Clinical Communication and Continuity of Care**

Village Medical is committed to maintaining effective clinical communication between treating practitioners, nursing staff and external after-hours providers.

Clinical information received from Hello Home Doctor is reviewed and incorporated into the patient's medical record as appropriate.

Where further assessment or follow-up is required, responsibility is allocated to an appropriate practitioner, with action taken according to clinical urgency.

Clinical handover between Village Medical locations is undertaken where necessary to ensure that outstanding treatment requirements, procedural follow-up and relevant clinical concerns are appropriately managed.

All staff are expected to maintain patient confidentiality and comply with the practice's privacy and clinical documentation requirements.

**10. Patient Information and Communication**

Village Medical ensures patients are provided with clear information regarding access to medical services during normal operating hours, scheduled closures and after-hours periods.

Information is communicated through appropriate channels, including telephone messaging systems, reception staff, practice signage and patient information materials.

During scheduled closure periods at Village Medical on Helen, patients contacting the clinic during business hours are redirected to Village Medical on Buronga Avenue for assistance.

Outside normal operating hours, patients are directed to Hello Home Doctor, Village Medical's nominated medical deputising service, for non-emergency medical care.

Patients may also access a Medicare Urgent Care Clinic for urgent, non-life-threatening medical conditions requiring timely assessment when their usual general practitioner is unavailable.

Medicare Urgent Care Clinics operate independently of Village Medical and provide an additional option for accessing appropriate medical care, subject to their operating hours and service availability.

Patients may also contact Healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for telephone-based health advice and assistance in identifying appropriate healthcare services.

Patients experiencing a life-threatening medical emergency are directed to telephone 000 or attend an appropriate emergency department.

**11. Roles and Responsibilities**

**Practice Manager**

The Practice Manager is responsible for overseeing operational arrangements, maintaining relevant service agreements, coordinating communication between clinic locations and ensuring staff understand applicable procedures.

**Nurse Manager**

The Nurse Manager is responsible for overseeing and coordinating nursing services across Village Medical to ensure appropriate continuity of care during scheduled clinic closures and periods of practitioner unavailability.

This includes coordinating nursing availability for post-procedural care, wound assessments, dressing changes and suture removal, ensuring appropriate clinical documentation and facilitating effective communication between nursing staff and treating general practitioners.

The Nurse Manager is responsible for ensuring nursing staff work within their professional scope of practice, follow established clinical protocols and appropriately escalate concerns, complications or changes in a patient's condition to an available general practitioner.

The Nurse Manager also supports the Practice Manager and Clinical Director in identifying and addressing clinical risks, reviewing nursing procedures and maintaining appropriate standards of patient care.

**General Practitioners**
General practitioners are responsible for providing appropriate clinical assessment, treatment, documentation and handover, including the management of procedural follow-up and clinical concerns arising during scheduled closure periods.

**Dr Moheb Gayed**
Dr Moheb Gayed remains available for telephone consultation and clinical assistance where required during scheduled closure periods at Village Medical on Helen, particularly in relation to patients requiring post-procedural follow-up or management of complications.

**Nursing Staff**
Nursing staff are responsible for providing appropriate post-procedural care, maintaining accurate clinical records and escalating concerns requiring medical assessment.

**Reception Staff**
Reception staff are responsible for managing redirected calls, communicating service availability, facilitating appointments and referring clinical concerns to an appropriate healthcare professional. Reception staff must not provide clinical advice outside their scope of responsibility.

**12. Monitoring and Review**
The Practice Manager, in consultation with the Clinical Director and Nurse Manager, is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of after-hours and continuity-of-care arrangements.

Arrangements are reviewed following significant changes to clinic operating hours, staffing, deputising services or identified concerns regarding patient access and clinical follow-up.
Any identified risks or service gaps are managed through Village Medical's established clinical governance and quality improvement processes.

**13. Variations**
Village Medical reserves the right to amend this policy in response to operational requirements, changes to clinical services, accreditation standards or relevant legislative obligations.

Any significant variation to after-hours arrangements or cross-site clinical support will be communicated to affected staff and practitioners.

**14. Associated Documents and References**
- RACGP Standards for general practices – 5th edition
- RACGP Standards for after-hours and medical deputising services
- Hello Home Doctor Medical Deputising Service Agreement
- Village Medical Telephone and Email Communication Policy
- Village Medical Clinical Handover Policy and Procedures
- Village Medical Privacy and Confidentiality Policy
- Village Medical Infection Prevention and Control Policy
- Australian Government – Medicare Urgent Care Clinics
- Healthdirect Australia – After-Hours Healthcare Services