

Southern College of Optometry



Forward**Thinking** | Future**Focused**

Clinical Programs *After-Hours* *On-Call* Protocol for Clinical Faculty & Residents

2025-2026

Updated and Edited Annually (06/30/2025) by

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In conjunction with the Director of Residency Programs

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1) INTRODUCTION

*This manual has been designed to provide you with basic information regarding our **After-Hours On-Call Service** and to serve as a reference during the provision of such care. Take time to thoroughly read the entire manual. Should you have questions, please feel free to contact either of us at your convenience.*

We have made changes to our processes in order to assure emergent/urgent care to OUR PATIENTS and incentivize clinical faculty for their participation.

Should you have any questions, please reach out to either of us at your convenience.

Sincerely,

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2) GENERAL GUIDELINES

A. Reporting / Supervision

The Vice President for Clinical Programs and the Chair of Clinical Education at Southern College of Optometry are responsible for oversight of the **After-Hours On-Call Program**. As an extension of patient care through the Clinical Programs they will monitor activities of clinical faculty / residents and review **After-Hours On-Call** Telephone Triage Forms. These Forms must be turned in to the Clinical Programs Administrative Coordinator, located in the Administrative Suite, 140 on the Main Level of The Eye Center each morning after an evening / night / day "On-Call". Any issues or problems you may encounter with your On-Call Duty should be brought to the attention of either the Vice President for Clinical Programs or the Chair of Clinical Education as soon as possible.

B. Responsibilities

As an optometric physician in the Clinical Programs of SCO you are responsible for the timely acceptance of your On Call Duty and appropriate "passage" of duty to the next individual in order of Duty.

"Duty" shall be defined as the period of time for which YOU are responsible for responding to urgent/emergent after-hours calls and those calls which may come during regular business hours of **The Eye Center at SCO (TEC)**, The **FocalPoint of SCO (TFP)** when scheduled clinic and/or college breaks occur as well as whenever the college is open "with no instruction". On Call Duty begins on Mondays of the date posted in the **After-Hours on Call** Schedule.

During your period of "duty" **you must be accessible by mobile phone at all times and no further away from Campus than 40 minutes by car!** During your On Call Duty, you are **expected to exercise professional judgement at all times and maintain a state of readiness to respond to patients in need.**

In the event that a personal emergency or illness renders you unable to be available as described above during YOUR On Call Duty, you will be responsible for finding another clinical faculty member to cover you during this period. Any other changes to the enclosed schedule must be brought to the attention of the Chief of Internal or External Clinics PRIOR TO THE DATE the change must occur.

It is not permissible for YOU to be unavailable to Clinical Programs After-Hours patients due to other responsibilities (i.e. part-time employment, etc.).

It is not permissible for a Clinical Programs patient to be seen by YOU at any facility other than the Emergency / Urgent After-Hours Exam Room located on the SCO Campus.

C. **Facilities**

All **After-Hours on Call** care provided will take place in room 136 on the Main Level (1st floor) of the Tower regardless of where the patient is typically seen during regular business hours (i.e. TEC, TFP). This room has been specifically equipped for this purpose. This room is more convenient and safer for providing After-Hours care.

Please report any equipment failures and/or supply issues to **Dr. Aaron Kerr, Chair of Clinical Education**, during regular business hours, as soon as possible. It is our goal to provide you with basic supplies and equipment (including necessary forms and paperwork) for the provision of care.

D. **Residency Programs Support**

As a part of our Residency Program, all in-house residents will be required to participate in eight weeks of “on call” coverage. The weeks assigned to each resident are noted on the After-Hours on Call Schedule. **If a resident is assigned during week/s/ for which you have “on call duty”; they will be carrying the mobile phone and will need to have access, via your mobile phone, to you for consults during your duty.**

3) **PROTOCOLS**

A. **Schedules, Schedule Changes and Coverage**

The SCO Intranet, IRIS, contains a location for the **After-Hours on Call** Schedule. This can be found by going to IRIS > Clinical Programs > Administration > **After-Hours on Call Protocol**.

It is the responsibility of each clinical faculty member to arrange for appropriate coverage or changes to the **After-Hours on Call** Schedule. Once arrangements have been made, the Vice President for Clinical Programs and the Chair of Clinical Education must be notified to update the schedule.

B. **Reporting for “Duty” / Passing “Duty”**

On Call Duty officially begins on Monday of the week listed in your **After-Hours on Call** Schedule. It will be the responsibility of the two clinical faculty members involved to arrange for “passage” of the On Call Mobile Phone. Any delinquencies in reporting for OR passing “duty” will be brought to the attention of the Chiefs of Intern & External Clinics and will be dealt with accordingly as a disciplinary matter.

C. **Telephone Triage of After-Hours Calls**

For the purposes of providing after-hour and scheduled Break coverage, an “**Eye Emergency / Urgency**” shall be defined as “***an event where eyesight is at risk.***” It will be your job to provide reassurance and assistance to those patients under the impression that they have a true “emergency”. **Triage** shall be defined as “***the process of contacting, obtaining pertinent data from, and making appropriate decisions regarding the urgent / emergent nature of a patient’s visual and/or ocular condition.***”

All patients who call the after-hours phone MUST have the courtesy of a returned call from the “On-Call” physician, no matter how mundane the situation seems.

The moment your interaction with a potential patient begins, the way you interact may set the tone for the entire conversation. Additionally, the first interaction initiates your responsibility and accountability for this patient’s care and eventual outcome.

We are **ONLY RESPONSIBLE TO CARE FOR CURRENT / EXISTING PATIENTS** through the ***After-Hours On-Call Service.***

Here are a few tips to remember when you are answering On Call messages:

- 1) You are representing all Staff Doctors, and staff of TEC and TFP in your capacity as an ***After-Hours On-Call*** provider;
- 2) Consider all calls as emergencies/urgencies when the patient perceives them as such and treat them as you would a family member;
- 3) Be calm and empathetic – show you care, be professional and collect pertinent facts quickly and efficiently;
- 4) Use the **After-Hours On -Call Triage Form** to collect data and to document the conversation;
- 5) Listen and document carefully. Avoid distractions and concentrate on the call.

If, during, the course of the phone triage, it is determined that a potentially life-threatening situation has occurred with the patient; instruct the patient to “***hang up and dial 911 immediately***” or get the address of the patient’s current location and tell them “***I am going to hang up and dial 911 for you.***”

If, during, the course of the phone triage, it is determined that an “eye emergency/urgency” exists; then you will be required to follow the guidelines outlined below, set up a time to meet the patient on campus and utilize your best examination and clinical decision-making skills. Any residents ‘on call’ with you will use YOUR advice, and/or their Residency Supervisors advice to provide care.

If no “eye emergency/urgency” exists, follow the guidelines and instruct the patient in establishing an appointment with one of our physicians, as appropriate.

The On-Call Resident, in consultation with their Residency Supervisor and/or the On Call Physician may deem it most appropriate to instruct the patient to go to the nearest Emergency Room (ER) for care.

The On-Call Resident, in consultation with their Residency Supervisor and/or the On Call Physician may deem it most appropriate to refer the patient to a secondary / tertiary provider.

The On-Call Resident / Physician should NOT independently prescribe drug therapy during phone triage unless the patient is under the active care of the optometric physician "on call". Only prescribe for an ocular condition AFTER the examination of the patient.

The On-Call Resident / Physician should NOT independently advise a patient (other than their own, established patient), over the phone, regarding the discontinuation or initiation of an established drug therapy without benefit of, at least, a record review.

The On-Call Resident / Physician is under NO OBLIGATION to come to the SCO Campus for TEC or TFP patients who have lost or broken spectacles or contact lenses. Instruct the patient in establishing an appointment during regular business hours.

The following is a guideline for the response time regarding some possible Eye (Ocular and/or Visual) Emergencies/Urgencies.

NOTE: This is not an all-inclusive list. Nothing supersedes the professional judgment of a doctor given specific circumstances in an urgent/emergent situation.

- 1) Respond by seeing the patient within the hour for suspected **Chemical Burns** and **Penetrating Injuries**. In the case of chemical splashes, instruct the patient to *"...flush their eye/s/ with copious amounts of clean, tap water"*.
- 2) Respond by seeing the patient within hours for **sudden loss of vision or visual field, flashes or floaters with vision or field loss, bulging eye, acute ocular trauma without penetration, foreign body, corneal abrasion, appearance of a "veil" or curtain across the field of vision, sudden changes in pupil size, recent onset pain without redness, eye pain with "steamy" vision and nausea / vomiting, any monocular patient, changes in Amsler's Grid; flashing lights in post-op patients, diabetic patients who "see red", corneal transplant patients with redness / photophobia / vision loss or pain, contact lens patients complaining of pain or redness;**
- 3) Respond by seeing the patient within 12 hours for **recent onset diplopia, new or increased spots or floaters, presence of pus or crusting, excessive tearing without foreign body sensation / photophobia;**

- 4) Respond by seeing the patient (or having them schedule an appointment during TEC or TFP regular business hours) within a week for **gradual loss of vision over three or more weeks, itching / tearing / white discharge over three weeks or more, mild redness over three weeks or more, lid masses, bumps or gray areas on sclera, cloudy vision for uncertain length of time**

D. Non-Emergent/Urgent Weekend Office Visits

There may be occasions when due to illness, emergency or travel a staff physician will ask the On-Call Physician / Resident to see a patient. When this is necessary, it will be the responsibility of the staff physician to identify the Physician / Resident On-Call and arrange for you to become familiar with and possibly even see the patient with him/her prior to the weekend visit.

E. Post-Operative Patients and their Emergent/Urgent Care

TEC and TFP have existing relationships with doctors at The Eye Specialty Group (ESG), and others locally, to provide secondary and tertiary eye health care for our patients. Most Peri-operative Care is performed by our own physicians in the Optometric Surgical Service of TEC. It will be YOUR responsibility to become familiar with the routine peri-operative protocols for the various surgical options available through our surgical colleagues.

F. When you have decided an After-Hours visit is Appropriate:

- Complete **After-Hours On-Call Telephone Triage Form**.
- Advise the patient to park in front of the TOWER and check in with Security Officer.
- Advise patient they will be billed for an After-Hours Visit.
- Call security and notify them of the agreed upon time to meet on Campus.
- Arrive on time. Park in front of the Tower and immediately check in with Security Officer.
- Escort patient to the Examination Room and request family members wait in the seating areas outside the examination room.
- Leave examination room DOOR OPEN AT ALL TIMES.
- Complete:
 - **Billing Policies Information for After-Hours Patients;**
 - **Authorization for Treatment & Financial Responsibility Form;**
 - **Acknowledgement of Privacy Practices (provide a copy to patient);**
- Provide care / document appropriately.

- Escort patient to Security and notify Officer of any additional After-Hours follow-up Visits.
- Instruct the patient to: *“Call TEC or TFP first think MONDAY MORNING to schedule any needed follow-up during regular office hours.”*
- Call Patient Services Representatives to inform them the patient will be calling OR to arrange follow-up care YOURSELF on the next business day and deliver / email the ***After-Hours On-Call Telephone Triage Form*** to the Vice President for Clinical Programs, Dr. Scott Ensor, or his designee.

NOTE: It is encouraged that all patients seen “after-hours” will be followed-up by the On-Call Resident / Physician, as needed, in their regular patient care schedule. If, however, the resident and/or physician is not scheduled or is scheduled in a Service Area that would not be appropriate for such follow-up care (i.e. Ocular Trauma in Pediatric Primary Care or Chemical Burn in Low Vision & Rehabilitation) then the follow-up appointment will be made in either Advanced Care Ocular Disease (ACODS) or the Optometric Surgical Service (OSS).

4). On Call Schedule (Located on IRIS)

A. SCO Security Information

While efficient and effective patient care after-hours and during scheduled SCO breaks is our primary goal, we are very concerned about your safety as you fulfill the On Call requirements of your program. SCO Security is to assist in providing a safe environment while you provide care. You must always notify SCO Security that you will be coming to the campus to provide After-Hours care. You should contact security immediately after you have spoken with the patient and have determined that a visit is necessary.

When calling Security, first identify yourself as the On Call Resident / Physician and inform them the time you have arranged to see the patient. Make sure to supply them with the patient’s name and your contact number.

The following numbers are the most effective means of contacting the SCO Security Officer on duty:

Phone: (901) 722-3306 OR (901) 722-3307

Mobile: (901) 212-0772 (ONLY for After-hours Patient Care)

NOTE: You must notify SCO Security of your arrival time prior to the patient showing up on campus

B. Schedule Changes

Please let the Vice President for Clinical Programs and the Chair of Clinical Education know of any changes to the schedule via email (whether staff doctors and/or residents) AS SOON AS YOU ARE AWARE OF THE NEED FOR A CHANGE.

The On-Call phone should be handed to the next resident **at NOON, but no later an 2:00 pm** each Monday.