After Hours Email Guidelines
UW–Madison Department of Ob-Gyn

The UW–Madison Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology values the time of our department members and recognizes the need to establish guidelines to maintain appropriate boundaries in regard to work email. It has been demonstrated that diminished work detachment due to email related overload does not necessarily stem from the time spent on handling work email, but instead is strongly tied to anticipatory stress caused by organizational expectations *(Belkin, L. After hours email expectations negatively impact employee well-being. Science Daily, 27 July, 2016).*

The following guidelines are proposed to define or organizational supported expectations and develop a normative culture that supports limited after-hours work expectations:

Manage expectations

- Department members are not expected to respond to emails outside of work hours; however, it is recognized that many members may choose to work after hours at home.
- If urgent issues arise and must be addressed after hours, another mutually agreed upon format will be used to communicate.
- Members will be cognizant of their positions within the department and their divisions and the power differential these positions impart.
- When choosing to send after hours emails, consider using a delayed send time (Can be done through Outlook by using: https://appuals.com/delay-schedule-sending-email-messages-outlook)
- Consider labeling importance of email and expected response time.
- Email is still a primary method of communication in the department. While we can work to be more mindful of time boundaries, it is still important to address and reply to messages within a reasonable window (within 2-3 working days)

Communicate response times

- In emails that are generated, communicate a need for a timely response and do not expect to receive a response outside of work hours
- In emails that are generated in response to another message, do not expect for your email to be read for 2-3 working days
- Divisions/work groups should discuss their individual work flow expectations for after hours emails

Create a schedule for who is on call so that urgent issues can be addressed

- For department members who have clinical responsibilities, reference clinical back-up services in out-of-office email messages
- For department members who have administrative responsibilities, reference administrative back-up in out-of-office email messages
- Address expected response times and ensure that identified back-up services are supported

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH

UW OB-GYN WELLNESS

An out of office message should include:

1. Dates/times you will be unavailable
2. Your return availability date/time
3. Who to contact in your absence
4. If patient concerns come through your inbox, include a medical contact

Sample messages:

Message for vacation/meeting/day away/ etc.

With absence dates:
I am currently out of the office from 5:00 PM December 6th, 2018, until 8:00 AM December 8th, 2018, and will have limited access to email. I will respond to your message when I return. If you need assistance in the meantime, please call the Maternal-Fetal Medicine office at 608.417.6099 or Email at uwmfmobgyn@wisc.edu.

With return date:
I am currently out of the office and will return December 6th, 2018. I will respond to your message at that time. If you need assistance in the meantime, please call the Maternal-Fetal Medicine office at 608.417.6099 or Email at uwmfmobgyn@wisc.edu.

Message for clinical service

I am on clinical service from December 6th-December 10th, 2018, and will have limited opportunity to check my email during the work day. If you need immediate assistance, please contact Emma Davis at 608-417-6099.

End of day message

Thank you very much for your email. I have left the office for the day and will respond to your email in the morning. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or if your medical concern is less urgent you may call the hospital operator to contact the on-call physician.

Message to clarify response time expectations

If you're receiving this email outside of your work hours, please note that I do not expect an immediate response.

If I'm emailing outside of your work hours, please note I do not expect a response until you are back in the office.

I often work on email outside of work hours, but you don't have to! If you're receiving this outside of your work hours, I do not expect a response until you are back in the office.