

CREW RIGHTS COMPASS

The Crew Rights & Welfare Handbook

Your contract, pay, rest
and health at sea.



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01 / UNDERSTAND | READER EDITION 1.0

Read this first

Life at sea combines a workplace, a home and a journey. When a contract, a payslip or a medical decision is unclear, it can be difficult to know which question to ask first. This handbook helps you identify the issue, keep useful records and find the right source of help.

It is written for cruise and merchant crew, including hotel, culinary, entertainment, concession, deck, engine and medical staff. It is also useful to families preparing for a first contract. Some of the practical checklists suit other maritime work, but the legal framework described here does not cover every vessel or employment arrangement.

What this edition does

This is an independent educational reader edition, version 1.0, dated 20 October 2026. It develops the author's earlier draft into a practical handbook with source notes, examples and printable worksheets. The author is a physician, not your lawyer. Independent maritime legal review has not been completed. No regulator, union, employer or support organisation endorses this publication.

International standards are a starting point. Your position may depend on national implementation, the ship's flag, the work you do, your employment agreement, any collective agreement and other applicable laws. This book does not decide whether a claim exists, calculate compensation or give instructions for filing proceedings. It is not medical diagnosis or treatment advice.

6. Sickness, injury and medical care

Care comes before paperwork

Seek assessment promptly when unwell or injured. Tell the clinical team what happened, what symptoms you have, what changed and which medicines or relevant conditions they need to know about. If there is no doctor on the vessel, use its designated medical arrangements and emergency procedure.

For severe symptoms or immediate danger, alert the responsible officer or medical team urgently. A handbook cannot assess your condition, clear you for duty or decide whether travel is safe. Do not delay care while waiting for HR, an insurer or a legal adviser to answer a financial question.

Four questions that should stay separate

Medical care, payment of medical expenses, sickness wages and compensation for lasting harm are different issues. Repatriation is another. An approval for a flight does not necessarily settle the arrangements for treatment at home or the pay period after sign-off.

The MLC framework addresses care and shipowner liabilities, but exclusions, permitted national limits and contract terms need individual checking. The often-mentioned 16-week provisions are not a universal promise of full salary for 16 weeks, or a universal end to every obligation. UK medical guidance, for example, distinguishes medical-cost limits from obligations pending repatriation. [1; A4.1-A4.2.1, 7, 8]

Ten practical steps

1. Seek medical help and tell the appropriate workplace contact that you need assessment or assistance.

2. Give an accurate account. If you do not remember part of an event, say so rather than filling the gap.
3. Ask how the incident is recorded and note the report reference, if there is one.
4. Ask what the plan is: treatment, tests, review, warning signs and whom to contact if you worsen.
5. Ask for copies of records through the proper process, including discharge instructions and duty restrictions.
6. Keep a factual symptom and appointment record. It supplements clinical records; it does not replace them.
7. If signing off, obtain written arrangements for travel, medication, follow-up, accommodation and a responsible contact.
8. Ask separately about medical costs, sickness pay, reimbursement and any insurer or financial-security process.
9. Read documents before signing. Ask for clarification and timely independent advice about a disputed release, resignation or legal statement.
10. Arrange follow-up with an appropriate clinician after returning home and share the relevant clinical information securely.

Before a medical transfer or journey home

Ask the treating team whether you are fit to travel and what assistance is required. Obtain a medication list, allergies, relevant results, the care plan and the next appointment or referral. Confirm who receives you, how you reach the next facility or home, and whom to call if the arrangements fail.

Do not accept 'medical arrangements completed' as an explanation if you still do not know where to go. Conversely, avoid changing a clinical plan based only on advice in a crew group. A second opinion should come from an appropriately qualified clinician with access to the relevant facts.

Medical certificates and disclosure

Answer medical questions honestly and clarify ambiguous wording with the examiner. If a certificate is refused or restricted, request the written outcome and the applicable review or appeal process promptly. The MLC provides for further examination in specified circumstances; the responsible authority determines how that process works. It is not a guarantee of a certificate or a particular result. [1; A1.2]

Protect confidentiality

Ask what information is needed by the employer and what can be limited to fitness, restrictions or arrangements. Send clinical records through appropriate channels. Do not put a colleague's or patient's information into your personal file merely because it might be relevant to a dispute. Ask an adviser about lawful preservation instead.

USEFUL QUESTION

'Please confirm who will coordinate my care after sign-off, how I contact them, what is authorised and how further treatment requests should be submitted.' Keep the answer with your travel and clinical documents.