

## **Resident duty hours: Globally accepted standards and the situation in Pakistan**

Madam, resident duty hours have been a widely debated topic over the years with conflicting views. Though, recently the trend has been to restrict work hours over the week so that adverse effects of working overtime are minimized. Data from studies conducted in different countries have shown that over working leads to deterioration of performance and may be harmful to both the patient and the caregiver. In light of these studies, many medical bodies in the developed world have put on a cap on the number of hours a resident is allowed to work in a given week.

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education in the US restricted consecutive work hours for physicians in 2003.<sup>1</sup> The Occupational Health and Safety Administration was moved last year to enforce medical work weeks with an 80 hour cap with not more than 16 hour shifts.<sup>2</sup> The question is: In this context why is not anyone taking notice of the residents' plights in this country? Where is the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council?

The reduction in the working hours is being sought based on solid evidence. Studies have found that residents who work more than 24 hours are 73% more prone to needle-stick injuries, perform at the 7th percentile of rested performance and are 2.3 times more likely to have car accidents. Twenty four hours without sleep slows reaction time similar to alcohol intoxication.<sup>3</sup> Interns working traditional call schedules are 36% more likely to make serious medical errors and 6 times more likely to make diagnostic errors than those working 16 hours shifts.<sup>4</sup> Hence, current unregulated work schedules in Pakistan not

only endangers the safety of healthcare professionals but also of the patients they care for.

The old maxim of limited work shifts hampering learning experiences has been disproved, though a few traditionalists still believe in it. Evidence suggests 16 hour work shifts do not adversely affect such experiences, improve patient safety and residents' quality of life.<sup>5</sup> New Zealand has enforced 16 hour work shifts since 1985.<sup>3</sup>

Similar local data on the subject is lacking but available international data demands that appropriate policies be framed and changes be made so as to ensure the safety of patients and the healthcare professionals.

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### **References**

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