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SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENTS BENEFIT DOCTORS AND PATIENTS
AMA Safe Hours Audit 2016

The AMA is today launching its *2016 Safe Hours Audit*, an online survey to assess the fatigue risk of the working hours of salaried doctors and doctors in training, including GP registrars.

The most recent Audit, conducted in 2011, found that 53 per cent of hospital doctors were working unsafe hours at that time, with reports of continuous unbroken shifts of up to 43 hours.

AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, said that fatigue and quality medical care do not mix.

Dr Gannon said the AMA is calling on governments and health authorities to do more to ensure safe workplaces and working conditions for all health and medical professionals.

“Australia has one of the best health systems in the world, yet dangerous workplace practices and arrangements can lead to doctors at significant risk of fatigue,” Dr Gannon said.

“Fatigue can impair judgement and work performance, and potentially affect patient care and the wellbeing of doctors. Serious medical errors increase with frequent long shifts. Extended shifts have a similar effect to working under the influence of alcohol.

“The AMA Safe Hours Audit is an important tool in assessing whether the risk of fatigue for doctors is being properly addressed, particularly in our public hospital system.

“The AMA has adopted a risk-based approach to working hours, acknowledging the need to minimise the risks of fatigue, but also preserve essential training opportunities and patient access to services.”

The AMA is urging all salaried doctors and doctors in training to complete the audit.

“Safe hours should not be viewed as an issue solely for doctors in training or an issue that affects only certain medical specialities – it affects all doctors,” Dr Gannon said.

Chair of the AMA Council of Doctors in Training, Dr John Zorbas, an advanced trainee in intensive care and emergency medicine at Royal Darwin Hospital, said that fatigue endangers patient safety and can have a real impact on the health and wellbeing of doctors.

“The 2016 Audit, like previous AMA Audits, will provide evidence of whether or not previous system improvements have been sustained, and what new measures need to be undertaken,” Dr Zorbas said.

The 2016 AMA Safe Hours Audit will be a snapshot of doctors’ working hours and patterns between 31 October and 6 November. The results will be made public early next year.

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