



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Fatigue and the surgical Trainee

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Amid international concerns over the working hours of surgeons, Australasian Trainee surgeons have said their working hours are generally 'about right' for their training needs, but believe they have insufficient time for study and research, delegates to the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told.

Dr Greg O'Grady, an Auckland based surgical Trainee and Chair of the College's trainees' association, was commenting on the findings of the College's Australasian Trainee Survey, an on-line survey of all current trainees.

"Given concerns surrounding trainee fatigue, notably in the United States, it was decided to try to gauge the impact of working hours and fatigue on the education of surgical Trainees here in Australia and New Zealand," Dr O'Grady said. "In the United States, where trainees work up to 80 hours a week, it has been argued that educational needs have been neglected in the formulation of duty-hours policy, engendering trainee dissatisfaction. This study sought to see whether such concerns exist here."

The survey's questions determined current working hours and the incidence of fatigue, and the influence of these factors on training and learning. The response rate was 55.3 per cent and responders were representative of the trainee population. On average, trainees spent 61 hours per week at work, with 74 per cent also being on-call after hours.

The majority of Trainees viewed their working hours as 'about right' for achieving technical (e.g. operative) training needs (65.6 per cent) as well as non-technical training needs (e.g. decision making) (62.6 per cent). However, most Trainees felt they have insufficient time for study and research ('too little' = 51.1 per cent; 'far too little' = 20.8 per cent). In addition, fatigue was thought to routinely compromise trainees' study and learning after work ('often' = 44.9 per cent; 'almost always' = 15.4 per cent).

Dr O'Grady noted that the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has developed Safe Working Hours Standards and these can be found on-line at the College's website. He said these standards should be more rigorously adhered to, in order to reduce the incidence of trainee fatigue.

Dr O'Grady concluded that several complex factors must be balanced to optimise Trainee working hours. "While practical training needs and patient care needs are met by most Trainees' rosters, there is little doubt that trainees would benefit from more study time and reduced fatigue. Further analysis of the data produced by this survey will enable us to identify what roster structures are perceived as most supportive or disruptive of training and learning," he said.

Dr O'Grady's presentation is one of hundreds at this year's ASC, covering all surgical specialties and aspects of surgical history and education. Nearly 2,000 delegates are expected to attend the ASC, which runs from 4 to 7 May and is being held at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre. The ASC program is available online at [www.surgeons.org](http://www.surgeons.org)

**Media inquiries:      Michael Barrett, Manager Media & PR Manager - 0429 028 933**  
**Ruth Charters, Senior Media & PR Officer - 0409 330 274**