



ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

# MEDIA RELEASE

## Eliminating surgical fatigue

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Surgeons at Queensland's Logan Hospital have demonstrated that registrars' fatigue can be eliminated without increased costs to an employing hospital and without compromising patient safety, according to the latest issue of the *ANZ Journal of Surgery*.

By restructuring their surgical unit and implementing a new on-call rota, Dr Peter Wysocki and Dr Brian McGowan were able to ensure that surgical registrars worked safer hours without a perceived effect on patient care.

"The idea to develop a new roster came from our desire to eliminate the need for registrars to work fatigued, to avoid a night roster and to prevent a shift-based roster being imposed by administration," Dr Wysocki said.

"We calculated that savings generated by reducing surgeons' working hours to a safer level would enable another registrar to be employed. While this ensures no decrease in the level of patient care, it does raise issues of continuity of care. Accordingly the structure of the surgical units was changed and consultant led patient handover meetings were instigated. An additional registrar was employed and a relieving registrar was made available."

The effectiveness of the new arrangements was measured by comparing actual hours worked during two twelve week surgical registrar rosters. Compliance of each roster with fatigue recommendations was assessed with software provided by Fatigue Audit InterDyne (FAID, InterDynamics Pty Ltd, Adelaide, Australia). Workload was determined from an electronic prospective surgical audit.

The impact of the roster change was discussed with consultants and registrars. The traditional roster started on 16 July 2007 while the fatigue-friendly roster commenced on 14 July 2008.

Results of the trial were striking. The total number of hours worked reduced by 11 per cent (from 5085.17 hours in 2007 to 4530.85 hours in 2008). Fatigue was eliminated (from 133.25 hours in 2007 to 0 hours in 2008). Over the twelve month period the operative workload for the Department of General Surgery increased by 18 per cent. FAID compliance improved from 67.3 per cent to 91.2 per cent. Consultant and registrar satisfaction with the new roster was high.

The authors note, however, that the elimination of fatigue necessarily reduces a registrar's exposure to patient care, and this needs to be recognised by all interested parties.

“We have shown that fatigue can be eliminated without increased expenditure but it requires major restructuring of surgical units. This results in dilution of each registrar’s exposure to patient care, which needs to be recognised by the trainees, public, media as well as the College of Surgeons,” Dr McGowan said.

*ANZ Journal of Surgery*, established more than 70 years and published by Wiley-Blackwell, is the pre-eminent surgical journal published in Australia, New Zealand and the South-East Asian region. The Journal is dedicated to the promotion of outstanding surgical practice, and research of contemporary and international interest.

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