Resident Work Rules Legislation
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Abstract

The excessive hours worked by resident-physicians are inherently dangerous to patients. A multitude of scientific studies have demonstrated significant cognitive impairment in sleep-deprived residents, yet many residents frequently work over 100 hours per week. In addition to cognitive deterioration, ‘burnt-out’, overworked residents are also prone to accidents and illness.

The revised American Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) work hour standards are a step in the right direction, but they do not go far enough in restricting hours, nor do they guarantee effective internal monitoring of work hour violations.

Resident work hours need to be limited in order to decrease medical errors, to improve quality of care, and to improve the quality of life of residents. Because the federal government spends $8 billion a year funding graduate medical education for resident physicians, it has a responsibility to monitor the quality of care provided by those residents, and therefore a duty to monitor resident physician work hours. I recommend support of The Patient and Physician Safety Act of 2003, which proposes effective enforcement of reasonable resident work hours in order to improve patient safety and the well being of resident physicians.