

PRESS RELEASE



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MORE SHIFTS MEAN GREATER RISK IN PATIENT HANDOVERS, WARNS MDDUS

Poor patient handover procedures in the increasing number of shift changes with the launch of the European Working Time Directive pose a significant medico-legal risk for doctors, warns MDDUS.

The UK-wide medical defence organisation says that there are renewed concerns of a breakdown in continuity of care as patients find they are being repeatedly handed over to different shifts. MDDUS says this has led to concerns over poor handover procedures exposing patients to potential and actual harm.

The warning from MDDUS comes as doctors are being encouraged to report their experiences of the patient handover process as part of a new investigation by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP).

Hospital trusts have increasingly been introducing more shifts since the introduction of the European Working Time Directive in August which restricted junior doctors' working hours.

The RCP has launched an investigation into handover systems in a bid to improve the process of transferring care from one medical team or consultant to another.

In a study simulating handovers using fictional patient scenarios, junior doctors given verbal handovers forgot 67 per cent of the information after the first handover and 97 per cent by the fifth handover.

Groups taking notes retained 87 per cent of important data with 85.5 per cent retained after the fifth handover. Another study showed that a structured handover form increased information retention from 73 per cent (plain paper notes) to 93 per cent.

MDDUS backs the RCP in warning that that changing shift patterns should not detract from the responsibility of doctors to ensure that safe and efficient care is delivered.

Dr Anthea Martin, senior medical adviser at MDDUS says: "We advise our members to be alert to the possibility of harm arising from poor handover procedures.

"Doctors must remember their obligation in terms of Good Medical Practice to 'communicate effectively with colleagues' and to be satisfied that suitable arrangements are in place to ensure that safe and effective handover of patient care takes place."

The RCP's project will start with a survey examining the various barriers to good handover practice.

An email invitation is being sent out to all UK doctors inviting them to take part in the online survey.

The results will be presented to a meeting at the College on May 20.

Ends

For further information contact Colin Calder on 0141 616 2677 or 07850 510881.

Note to editors

MDDUS (Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland) is a medical defence organisation providing access to professional indemnity and expert medicolegal advice for doctors, dentists and other healthcare professionals throughout the UK.

For further information on MDDUS go to www.mddus.com.