

HOSPITALS - Safety in management's hands  
Sunday Age, The (Melbourne, Australia) - Sunday, March 10, 1996  
from Dr Marcus R. Wigan .

BRETT Parris's letter (3/3) raises the question of the application of occupational health and safety legislation (OHSA) to such situations as doctors making errors as a result of working excessive scheduled hours. OHSA legislation should apply to such irrational direction by hospital administrations.

Under OHSA, an industrial accident (and an error made by a doctor under 30-plus hours' extended duty conditions under administrative direction could hardly be called anything else) is classified as a criminal offence for directors and management.

Hospital administrators and the Victorian Department of Health should comment on their efforts (or otherwise) to discharge such responsibilities were OHSA to be applied.

Pilots with responsibility for the lives of many people are not permitted to work excessive hours and yet have massive technical and personnel support. Clearly, those responsible for directing doctors to work with direct responsibilities for life have little concern about their conditions. In a recent reported case in country Victoria, a doctor working under extreme and extended conditions did make a mistake. The administration, apparently, was not held responsible in any meaningful way for these conditions.

In this era of greater accountability, legal structures and very high pressures on professional staff, it is clearly urgent to question these areas in medicine where the accountability for workplace incidents (the intrinsic nature of most doctors' work in a hospital) is not sheeted home to the management's responsibility for workplace conditions, as it now is in industry.

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