Anticipating and managing fatigue associated with doctors’ working patterns

When are you at risk of fatigue?

If you are not getting the right amount of sleep for yourself or adults need 7-9 hours of good-quality sleep per night. This can be caused by:

- working long shifts, including on-call and overnight working hours (4-5 hours);
- shifting work patterns (particularly shifts and late shifts);
- working alone or on duty, not having adequate recovery time between shifts (minimum of 10 hours);
- sleep interruption (eg unplanned interruptions during night work giving advice on patient care when on call);

As you get older, your sleep patterns change and your ability to recover from sleep is slower.

This is why it is important to understand and apply the principles of 40:10:0.

When are you at risk of fatigue?

- You are at risk of fatigue if you are working long shifts.
- You are at risk of fatigue if you are working the night shift.
- You are at risk of fatigue if you are working shifts that involve night work.
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What are the risks of fatigue?

When fatigue, you are more likely to:

- make clinical and diagnostic mistakes;
- suffer a needlestick injury or be involved in a traffic crash driving home;

If you are on call or on duty for long periods of time, you are more likely to:

- make unnecessary decisions;
- make clinical errors and diagnostic mistakes;
- suffer an accident or be involved in a traffic crash driving home;

Managing the ‘night shift’

Getting your sleep environment right

You should make sure:

- your bed, mattress and pillows are comfortable and support your body;
- your bedroom is as dark as possible;
- your bedroom is as quiet as possible;
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