

Question on Notice
No. 145
Asked on 20 February 2007

MS STONE asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

With reference to doctors in hospitals who have historically always worked long hours—

What is the State Government doing to reduce the incidence of doctor fatigue?

ANSWER:

Queensland Health has embarked on a \$3.6 million Alert Doctors Strategy to address fatigue-related risks for doctors and patients.

Queensland Health has in place fatigue reporting arrangements which allow doctors to report when they feel fatigued and require supervisors to assess and manage the risk of current and future instances of fatigue.

Medical managers must review the rostering and work arrangements of junior doctors to ensure work practices that lead to fatigue risks are managed.

New procedures have also been introduced to ensure that long working hours for doctors are actively managed throughout Queensland Health. These procedures require a supervisor to take action once a doctor has worked 13 hours in one day and is unlikely to finish work within another three hours. Queensland Health is continuing to work with doctors and their unions to implement appropriate measures to address doctor fatigue.

Since October 2006 Queensland Health has been monitoring doctors' working hours. There has been a 40% decrease in instances where doctors work more than 40 hours of overtime per fortnight. There has also been a 20% decrease in instances where junior doctors cannot access an eight-hour break between shifts.

Queensland Health is also hosting a Fatigue Management for Doctors Forum featuring Dr Simon Eccles from the United Kingdom's National Health Service Hospital at Night project as well as a number of other eminent speakers from Australia and New Zealand. The speakers will highlight the actions they have taken to address fatigue and fatigue-related risks for doctors and patients, and medical managers will consider the application of these actions to Queensland Health hospitals.

Queensland Health has engaged the University of South Australia's Centre for Sleep Research to help develop an evidence-based fatigue risk management framework for its doctors. From March, 13 hospitals will be involved in case studies to identify the impact of existing work practices on patients and doctors, the levels of risk to patient safety and the implementation of locally appropriate solutions to this problem. The findings from these case studies will be used to implement a fatigue risk management framework throughout Queensland Health within 18 months.

Queensland Health will also undertake a review and refurbishment of on call rooms, so that doctors who are on call overnight at hospitals can rest in adequate facilities.