

Tuesday 20 January 2009

The European Working Time Directive

The issues related to the European Working Time Directive are now assuming great urgency. Many Trusts are finding it difficult to meet its requirements and few have a coherent plan that would allow full compliance by the deadline of August 2009, when all doctors are required to work an average of 48 hours per week.

An informal survey carried out by the Faculty of Clinical Radiology suggests that most training departments having difficulties with the directive and are anticipating that its full implementation next August would result in major problems with both training and service work. Clinical Oncology units report similar concerns.

Doctors' working hours are an international problem. The medical profession has never kept 'office hours'. Many European countries have either ignored the directive or have complied with it only nominally. The USA has kept the working hours of junior hospital doctors to 80.

The Royal College of Surgeons is seeking a specialty-specific opt-out. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges is examining this issue urgently and may ask for at least a temporary derogation.

The Royal College of Radiologists is considering this matter in depth and will consult with other Colleges and with as many departments of Clinical Oncology and Clinical Radiology as possible before deciding what action to take.

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