



LETTERS

BLACK WEDNESDAY

Consultants might be less available on Black Wednesday

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The start date for new junior doctors is referred to as “Black Wednesday,” coined after a 2009 study showed that patients admitted to hospital in the first week in August had a 6-8% higher mortality rate than those admitted in the last week of July.¹ As *The BMJ* points out,² several organising bodies responded to this research. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and NHS employers released joint recommendations, which suggested introducing mandatory inductions and flexible and intelligent rota design, reducing elective procedures, and ensuring consultant availability.³

Maintaining adequate consultant staffing is a challenge in August, when schoolchildren are on summer holiday. In the theatres and anaesthetics division at The Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, the average total days of annual leave taken by consultants in August in 2013-15 was 196.7 days, nearly twice as many as in June (102.2 days). Similarly, consultants in the emergency department took an average of 38 leave days in June, compared with 131 in August.⁴ Similar trends were reported in oncology, clinical imaging, and pathology.

Contrary to recommendations, consultants are taking more days of leave in the month that junior doctors begin work. If these trends are consistent throughout the health service then perhaps we should reconsider when junior doctors begin work. These are only crude data from one trust, so we intend to investigate the amount of consultant leave during these dates more systematically.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Jen MH, Bottle A, Majeed A, Bell D, Aylin P. Early in-hospital mortality following trainee doctors' first day at work. *PLoS One* 2009;4:e7103. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0007103 pmid:19774078.
- 2 Rimmer A. 60 seconds on . . . Black Wednesday. *BMJ* 2017;358:j3574. doi:10.1136/bmj.j3574 pmid:28747303.
- 3 Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, NHS Employers. Recommendations for safe trainee changeover. June 2013. <http://www.nhsemployers.org/case-studies-and-resources/2013/06/recommendations-for-safe-trainee-changeover>
- 4 The Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust. Response to information request. <https://doclibrary-rcht.cornwall.nhs.uk/DocumentsLibrary/RoyalCornwallHospitalsTrust/Websites/Internet/OurOrganisation/FreedomOfInformation/DisclosureLog/2015/201509/FOIRef953MedicalConsultantsAnnualLeaveJuneToAugustInYears2013To2015V2.pdf>

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