

FATIGUE AND STRESS AMONGST HOSPITAL DOCTORS

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All hospital doctors working in University of Malaya Medical Centre (UMMC), Malaysia, were invited to participate in this study. Sixty-eight responded and were asked to report their socio demography, status and duration of working in the hospital, fatigue symptoms based on the 'Fatigue Symptoms Questionnaire' and their stress levels by using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-30) (1,2).

Women physicians responded more than male doctors and their mean age was 35.0 (± 7.7) years. Sixteen (24%) of them were single and 52 (76%) were married. There were 9 (13%) housemen, 21 (31%) medical officers, 23 (34%) clinical lecturers and 15 (22%) consultants. Six (9%) had been working for less than 6 months in UMMC, 31 (46%) for 6 months to 4 years and 31 (46%) had been with UMMC for more than 4 years.

The mean total fatigue scores was 7.5 (± 4.8). The junior doctors had higher fatigue levels as compared to the senior ones ($p = 0.02$). There was no significant difference in the level of fatigue between female and male

doctors. Twenty-five (37%) of the doctors had significantly prolonged fatigue. The most severe and frequent complaints were i) having difficulty to start doing things, ii) the need to rest and iii) get tired easily. Work stress was perceived as the contributing factor by 11(44%) of the fatigued doctors and 5(20%) blamed the stress from relationship difficulties. Twenty-three (34%) of the doctors had significant psychological stress. Scores of on the GHQ declined with increasing age ($r = -0.3$, $p = 0.03$). There was high association between fatigue and psychological stress ($F = 2.32$, $p = 0.008$).

Fifteen (22%) of the doctors had fatigue and psychological stress. Scores on the Fatigue Symptoms and GHQ were positively correlated ($r = 0.62$, $p = 0.000$). The GHQ did not detect 10 (40%) of the fatigue 'cases' identified by the Fatigue questionnaire, while Fatigue questionnaire did not detect 8 (35%) of the stress 'cases' identified by the GHQ.

The results from this study were in keeping with other studies (3,4). However, the study uncovered that hospital doctors with symptoms of prolonged fatigue are at risk of having undetected psychological stress related disorder.

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