

Guidelines for surgical residents' working hours. Intent vs reality.

Title: Guidelines for surgical residents' working hours. Intent vs reality.

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To comply with voluntary California medical school guidelines, our general surgery residency program reduced in-house call to 1 in 4 nights, and scheduled a 72-hour work-week. We assessed the effectiveness of these changes by prospectively surveying the actual working hours of surgical house staff through completion of a daily schedule for 1 month. Actual in-hospital hours averaged 98 per week, significantly exceeding the scheduled hours, and were greater for interns (100 hours) and junior residents (97 hours) than for chief residents (95 hours). Twenty hours (22%) of nonconference waking hours were spent on so-called scut work. Significant reduction of intern work hours could be accomplished by expansion of ancillary care, allowing more time for direct patient care. The effect on senior house staff hours would be less dramatic but might be sufficient to bring hours into compliance with proposed limits.