



## Working Time Directive (EWTD)

### **Our position**

Cancer Research UK believes that the ongoing review of the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) presents an opportunity to improve patient services and the working environment to protect healthcare professionals' health and safety. However, in order to achieve world class cancer services, it is vital to align implementation of the directive with specialty training and service needs.

We are particularly concerned about the following issues:

1. **Continuity of care:** Reduced hours and changes in shift patterns are anecdotally affecting patient care through an increased number of handovers and lack of formal handover procedures<sup>1</sup>.
2. **Patient safety:** Full shift patterns are reportedly impairing patient safety by reducing the number of doctors covering patient care. This is noted particularly at night when restrictions under the EWTD mean that some services are left with one junior and one consultant as cover, with middle grade cover absent.
3. **Quality of training:** Responsibility for 'out of hours' service provision – and the subsequent rest periods that follow – means that some trainees are not receiving the same exposure to training opportunities as they did prior to implementation of the EWTD<sup>2</sup>. This is of particular concern for trainee surgeons, since their training is more focused on practical procedures than in other medical specialties<sup>3</sup>. We know that patients treated by doctors carrying out higher volumes of surgical procedures do better. For example, there is good evidence that there is a clear relationship between high volume providers and better long-term survival for colorectal cancer<sup>4</sup>. It is vital that surgeons are sufficiently experienced to deliver high quality and safe treatment for cancer patients.

Anecdotal evidence of the implementation of the EWTD in other European member states is very mixed, with some implementing it effectively and others reporting it is not implemented in practice, or has similarly impacted on training and patient care<sup>5</sup>.

**It is clear that in order to protect the priorities listed above, changes must be made to the current system of training and service provision. Training bodies and service providers must work together to ensure that quality and safety of cancer services are not compromised by the implementation of the EWTD.**

<sup>1</sup> Do reduced doctors' working hours create better safety for patients? – assessing the evidence (2009), Royal College of Surgeons England <http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/policy/documents/EWTD%20tiredness2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Improving cancer outcomes: analysis of the implementation of the UK's cancer strategies 2006-2010 - A report by Cancer Research UK (2010), p6, pp.42-43

<http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/publicpolicy/ourpolicypositions/cancerplan/>

<sup>3</sup> 'The impact of EWTD on delivery of surgical services – a consensus statement (2008), Association of Surgeons of Great Britain and Ireland <http://www.asgbi.org.uk/download.cfm?docid=F3FAB184-01E1-414A-BA7C0CE07BBEDD7F>

<sup>4</sup> Volume and outcome in colorectal cancer surgery, European Journal of Surgical Oncology (EJSO) Volume 36, Supplement 1, September 2010, Pages S55-S63

[http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=PublicationURL&\\_tockey=%23TOC%236784%232010%23999639999.8998%232236734%23FLA%23&\\_cdi=6784&\\_pubType=J&view=c&\\_auth=y&\\_acct=C000047881&\\_version=1&\\_urlVersion=0&\\_userid=911953&md5=0d531c642f80d8beebdb81f2506e446c](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=PublicationURL&_tockey=%23TOC%236784%232010%23999639999.8998%232236734%23FLA%23&_cdi=6784&_pubType=J&view=c&_auth=y&_acct=C000047881&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=911953&md5=0d531c642f80d8beebdb81f2506e446c)

<sup>5</sup> Latest European Level EWTD Information, Dr. Peter Maguire, Chairman, BMA Council EWTD Working Party, Consultant Anaesthetist, Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry

[http://connect.bma.public-i.tv/document/Dr\\_Peter\\_Maguire\\_presentation.pdf](http://connect.bma.public-i.tv/document/Dr_Peter_Maguire_presentation.pdf)

## **Background**

The EWTD is part of the European Union (EU) health and safety legislation which lays down requirements in relation to working hours. It states that most workers must not work over 48 hours a week unless they opt-out voluntarily. This limit includes all time spent training and 'on-call'. The directive was brought into UK law under the Working Time Regulations in 1998 and the 48 hour week was fully implemented in August 2009.

In addition, a 'New Deal' was introduced to reduce the working hours of junior doctors and improve their working conditions. However, by implementing the EWTD, with the New Deal, we believe there have been some unintended consequences.

A review of the impact of the EWTD was carried out by Medical Education England in 2010<sup>6</sup>. The report highlighted that hard evidence of the impact of the Directive is lacking but information and opinion was clear and consistent. The report concluded that high quality training can be delivered in 48 hours. However, this is precluded when trainees have a major role in out of hours service, are poorly supervised and access to learning is limited<sup>7</sup>.

## **About Cancer Research UK**

Cancer Research UK is the world's largest independent organisation dedicated to cancer research; in 2009/10 we spent £334 million on research. Our vision is that "Together we will beat cancer". We carry out world-class research to improve our understanding of cancer and to find out how to prevent, diagnose and treat different types of the disease. Around 300,000 people are diagnosed with cancer in the UK every year. And every year more than 150,000 people die from the disease.

Our position on the EWTD was developed in coordination with a number of surgeons funded by Cancer Research UK.

For more information contact Cancer Research UK's Policy and Public Affairs team on 020 3469 8360 or [publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk).

---

<sup>6</sup> Time for Training: A Review of the impact of the European Working Time Directive on the quality of training  
Professor Sir John Temple (May 2010)

[http://www.mee.nhs.uk/our\\_work/work\\_priorities/review\\_of\\_ewtd\\_impact\\_on\\_tra.aspx](http://www.mee.nhs.uk/our_work/work_priorities/review_of_ewtd_impact_on_tra.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*