

# Long work hours affect medical residents

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Researchers say long hours of work required of most medical residents affects their neurobehavioral performance like alcohol impairment.

Researchers said medical interns who got 5.8 fewer hours sleep, had 50 percent more attentional mistakes, and made 22 percent more serious errors on critical care units while working a traditional schedule, compared with a schedule with fewer hours.

J. Todd Arnedt of the University of Michigan and colleagues compared post-call neurobehavioral performance of 34 medical residents after their rotations to examine the effect of extended work hours.

The researchers found performance impairment during a heavy call rotation was comparable to impairment associated with a .04 to .05 grams percent blood alcohol concentration during a light call rotation.

Compared with light call, heavy call reaction times were 7 percent slower and lane variability and speed variability during a simulated driving test were 27 percent and 71 percent greater, in that order.

"These findings have important clinical implications," researchers concluded. "Residents must be aware of post-call performance impairment and the potential risk to personal and patient safety."

The study is detailed in the Sept. 7 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

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