

## Studies: shorter shifts for interns fail to decrease medical errors

When a medical student graduates and begins his or her internship, long hours are part of the deal. Until recent years, these interns had to work up to 36 hours straight. Because of the long hours, regulators decided to reduce their shifts to 16 hours in 2011. Regulators reasoned that the interns were tired and overworked and were making medical errors as a result.

Although it flies in the face of reason, the medical regulators were mistaken, according to two recent studies published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*. The studies found that the shorter shifts did not lead to fewer medical errors. On the contrary, the number of errors increased.

In the first study, researchers from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor surveyed 2,300 physicians at 12 hospital systems. Every three months, the physicians responded to a survey. The results were compared with a similar survey of interns conducted before the shorter shift rules went into effect.

The study found that before shorter shifts were instituted in 2010, 19.9 percent of interns said that they made an error that resulted in patient harm. However, after the shorter shift regulations went into effect, the percentage increased to 23.3 percent. About half of the errors that the interns admitted to were [medication errors](#). The other half consisted of failures to diagnose, incorrect treatments and procedural or [surgical errors](#).

The researchers theorized that the errors increased due to the fact that the interns had to do the same amount of work in a shorter time period. In addition, the shorter shifts compressed the interns' workday so much that much-needed downtime, where the interns could have a break from the day's toils, was reduced.

The second study by Johns Hopkins University echoed similar results. The study found that the shorter shifts did not increase the amount of sleep each intern got over the long run. Additionally, the study found that the shorter shifts reduced the amount of training each intern received. Finally, the shorter shifts did not always allow interns to see patients' treatment through to conclusion, forcing them to handoff cases to other interns. Researchers speculate that all three of these factors would increase the risk of medical errors.

**Consult a medical malpractice attorney**

Since the shorter shift regulations were enacted recently, it is possible that the mindset of the health care system has not yet adjusted to the new ways. Whatever the reason for the increase in errors, if you have been injured by a medical error, it may constitute medical malpractice.

Under Arizona law, victims of malpractice are entitled to recover compensation. An experienced medical malpractice attorney can ensure that your right to compensation is protected.