

Doctors & Fatigue



Maj (Dr) Ahmad Filza bin Ismail (Rtd)
SCHOMOS Deputy Secretary
afilzaismail@gmail.com

In the past few years, we have seen a lot of cases where healthcare workers particularly doctors perished in commuting or road traffic accidents. It is not only a loss to the victim's family and beloved ones, but also a great loss to the organisation and nation. Whenever the mishaps happen, the cause often pointed to human factors; fatigue and reckless driving.

It has been reported widely that commuting accidents contribute to the substantial number of accidents handled by Social Security Organization (SOCISO) (Selamat and Surity, 2015). The number is increasing, proportionately to the number of vehicles and travelling made.

Studies also have shown that the commuting accidents happen during travel to and from work (88.5%), during the morning shifts (68.8%) and involving less than five kilometres of travel (55.0%). Among them, the motorcycles riders contributed significantly to these casualties; 49.7% of casualties and 58.7% of the total fatalities (Hoe, 2014).

Among the healthcare workers, it has been shown that doctors are also the victims although the number is small compared to other group such as nurses. Out of the 554 hospital staff members who were involved in such accidents from 2014 to 2016, more than half, or 295, were nurses and 12.5% or 69 got into accidents following being on duty after normal office hours – between 5.00pm and 8.00am – with 47 of the 69 involving nurses (Fong, 2017).

The Director General of Health, Datuk Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah and The Chairman of National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye had expressed their concern on the alarming increasing trend in numbers of road traffic accident among the healthcare workers since the past four years (NST, 2017; Thye, 2017).

It has been discussed that the contributing factors to road traffic accidents are human, vehicle and environmental factors (WHO, 2017). The most highlighted and debatable cause is the human factor. All of the factors are 'modifiable' factors which could be improved and avoided.

Let us focus on the human factor, since it is the only

factor that can be modified by ourselves. The other factors such as vehicle and road condition, in general need further assessment by other parties.

One of the cause of human factor in road traffic accident is fatigue or driving while one feels tired or sleepy. This would distract the focus of a driver. Other human behaviours also lead to mishaps such as reckless driving, speeding, using mobile phone while driving (talking or texting) and not to forget driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

If it is true that the main cause of road traffic accidents among the healthcare workers is due to after-work fatigue and sleep deprivation, the main concern is how to overcome this issue, and since it is a modifiable and preventable factor, how to modify and to prevent it.

A wise man said 'Do not drive when you are tired or sleepy'. The keywords here is 'Do not drive', let someone drive for you, i.e. by using other means of transport. There are hospitals which provide transportation to their staff to commute to work. Once again, it is back to our people, whether they wish to use the provided transport or still insist to use their own cars. By using the provided transport, indirectly we also could solve the issue of parking place in the hospitals.

The other keywords here are 'tired or sleepy'. Therefore, after a long and sleepless night, one needs a rest. A circular from the Deputy Director General of Health dated 28 October 2009 clearly stated that a medical officer or specialist should be given a post-call day off after he or she has done with the morning ward rounds and handed over the tasks to his or her colleagues. This is subject to the service needs and requirements. It means, the wise decision of the hospital administrator is important here. With an abundance of housemen and medical officers in the hospitals, a better plan for them to do the job effectively without jeopardising the service and their wellbeing should be planned.

A fatigued and tired doctor not only is prone to road traffic accident, but prone to harm others too, in this context, the patients. Whatever the reasons, undoubtedly a good rest after a long working hours or after a sleepless night is essential.

BE SAFE Campaign and Study Initiative

In order to understand more on the situation, MMA in collaboration with other medical-based NGOs and the related government agencies; and universities are in the stage of drafting a proposal to conduct a research on the association between the fatigue and road traffic among doctors. Among the objectives of this study are:

1. To describe the medical doctors' working hours in Malaysia.
2. To identify the prevalence of fatigue and sleep quality among medical doctors in Malaysia.
3. To determine the association of doctor working hours on fatigue and sleep quality.
4. To determine the correlation of working hours and fatigue among doctors in Malaysia.
5. To study the association between fatigue level and risk of road crash involvement among doctors in Malaysia.

It would be a cross sectional study. The doctors who would be selected to participate in this study would be given a set of questionnaires and they are required to give their consent to take part in the study, and it is

essential that they give the true and sincere response. The importance of this study is to gain a valid and concrete data to be forwarded to the authority for them to come out with a policy to improve the wellbeing of the doctors in general.

Before the result of the study comes out, do not wait until the accidents happen again. Let us be extra careful while on the road. Drive safe, drive carefully. Do not drive when you are tired or sleepy.

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Further information: Please contact Professor Lum Siew Kheong FRCSed, FACS, FRACS(Hon), FAMS, FAMM, Head of Department of Surgery, at siewkheong_lum@imu.edu.my for more information or informal discussions.

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International Medical University
126, Jalan Jalil Perkasa 19, Bukit Jalil,
57000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: +60 3 8656 7228
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