

1. Introduction

Medical ward cover on-call shifts provide rich learning opportunities for junior doctors to gain experience managing unwell patients.

The nature of out-of-hours work dictates that there are fewer doctors 'on the ground', often meaning they work alone. Research recognises that medical errors are more likely to occur when junior doctors do not access support from senior colleagues.¹ Furthermore, access to senior support is an important component of effective clinical supervision and development of the key skills required to be a junior doctor.²

This project aimed to:

1. Evaluate Foundation Year One (FY1) Doctors' access to senior support from both **senior house officers (SHO)** and **registrars (SpR)** during out-of-hours shifts.
2. Ascertain preconceived barriers to accessing senior support in these situations.

2. Method

A survey was distributed in January 2022 to 41 FY1 doctors working on the medical rota at Croydon University Hospital.

The survey was completed anonymously via Microsoft Forms, accessed through a link or a QR code distributed to doctors through mobile messaging services.

The survey consisted of:

Short answer text boxes

Multiple choice ranges

10-point Likert scales

The results were analysed using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

3. Results

A total of 21 responses to the survey were received (51.2% response rate). Over 90% of respondents felt that ward cover shifts were a good learning opportunity.

FY1 doctors were more likely to be able **identify** the **SHO** than the **SpR** for both **weekday** and **weekend** shifts:

33% always knew who the **SHO** was on a **weekday** shift
 48% always knew who the **SHO** was on a **weekend** shift
 10% always knew who the **SpR** was on a **weekday** shift
 43% always knew who the **SpR** was on a **weekend** shift

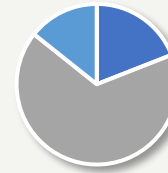
FY1 doctors were more likely to **contact** the **SHO** than the **SpR** during both **weekday** and **weekend** shifts.

No. of times **SHO** contacted during **weekday** shifts



■ Never
 ■ 1-2 times per shift
 ■ 3-4 times per shift
 ■ 5 or more times per shift

No. of times **SpR** contacted during **weekday** shifts



Likert scale answers rating how comfortable the respondents felt contacting their seniors out-of-hours revealed FY1s felt more comfortable contacting the **SHO** than the **SpR**.



Furthermore, when asked about why they may be hesitant to contact the **SpR**, the most common reason was: **"They are too busy, and I don't want to disturb them."**

Thematic analysis of free text responses identified possible solutions:

42.8% felt a start of shift meeting or joining a mobile messaging group would help them feel more supported.
 Some suggested increasing staff levels (19%) & improving communication with senior colleagues (23.8%) would enhance learning.

4. Discussion

The survey results highlighted that on both weekday and weekend ward cover shifts:

FY1s were more likely to contact or seek advice from an **SHO** than the **SpR**.

This is consistent with FY1 doctors being encouraged to escalate queries appropriately up the ladder of senior colleagues, and therefore is not entirely unexpected.

However, the results did highlight that frequently FY1s are not aware of which colleagues are available to support them, which could feed into feelings of isolation. The low level of comfort reported at contacting the registrar reinforces hierarchical models of the on-call system.

Moving forward, implementing regular meetings and improving communication could help foster a team mentality and increase support for new doctors.

References

- [1] Kroll L, Singleton A, Collier J, Rees Jones I. Learning not to take it seriously: junior doctors' accounts of error. Medical Education 2008;42(10):982-990.
- [2] Kendall ML, Hesketh EA and Macpherson SG. The learning environment for junior doctor training - what hinders, what helps. Medical Teacher 2005; 27:7, 619-624.

