

THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE ON THE DELIVERY
OF CARDIOTHORACIC SURGERY

The planned introduction of the European Working Time Directive (EWTD) in 2009 and changes to training as a result of Modernising Medical Careers (MMC) have raised questions about service delivery within the NHS. Cardiac surgery has always been very dependent on “middle grade” surgical trainees for service provision both in theatre and in providing resident cover in the Intensive Care Unit.

The document “Exploring New Ways of Working in Cardiothoracic Surgery” was published by the Department of Health Workforce Review Team in February 2005. It followed a joint workshop held with the Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery (SCTS) and the SAC in Cardiothoracic Surgery and was a wide ranging review of the UK Cardiothoracic Workforce. In 2007 Mr S Livesey and Ms T Bartley from the SCTS Executive reviewed the impact of this document and produced the paper ‘Staffing Cardiothoracic Units; Developing a workforce for the 21st century’, which put forward a framework for the development of roles and service delivery.

The SCTS has now conducted a bench-marking exercise to review how Cardiothoracic surgery departments plan to staff their units when the EWTD is implemented – it is of concern that little progress seems to have been made.

The survey revealed that urgent action is imperative at Trust level to avoid an impending crisis in service delivery. It is acknowledged that in August 2009 there will not be the previous numbers of trainee surgical staff who currently provide the service. The strategic options are either to employ a large number of staff grade doctors or to develop the roles of Surgical Care Practitioners, Peri-operative Specialist Practitioners and Critical Care Practitioners. The consensus favoured the latter as being more sustainable in the long term.

The SCTS implores Chief Executives to review current service delivery and use the finding of this National survey to direct their strategic planning. On a positive note, we understand that the Department of Health have recently given PCTs £100 million to help achieve compliance with the EWTD.

Yours sincerely

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