

ASA PS25

ASA Statement on Rest Facilities in Hospitals

Background

The provision of after-hours care in hospitals necessitates the availability of medical personnel at short notice.

Depending on local factors, anaesthetists can provide after-hours cover from home, or within the hospital. Many hospitals have anaesthesia registrars providing 24-hour onsite anaesthesia coverage for urgent or life-saving surgery and emergency medical responses.

Anaesthesia and surgery are generally avoided overnight unless patients are likely to suffer harm from any delay to therapy. Treatment is safer during normal operating hours when the full services of the hospital are available. Treatment in-hours also reduces the risk of fatigue in clinicians.

The importance of rest

Fatigue has a negative impact upon cognitive and manual abilities. Anaesthesia and surgery require skill and concentration, which are both reduced in fatigued subjects.

However, the impact of fatigue extends well beyond the workplace. Driving ability is impaired by fatigue, placing tired drivers and other road users at risk.

Anaesthetic trainees are rostered on a rotational basis to provide access to all aspects of anaesthetic practice. This includes regularly changing between day and night shifts, which adds to the fatigue load and sleep debt.

Risk and benefit

It is inevitable that some patient care will be delivered after-hours, by fatigued clinicians. The risk to patients, clinicians and road users must be justified by the benefits of this care.

Systems and policies to minimise risk should be considered by hospitals.

Rest facilities in hospitals

Given that only urgent treatment will be undertaken overnight, there may be periods when anaesthetists are not actively engaged in the provision of therapy to patients. These periods represent an opportunity to rest in order to maintain a high level of cognitive focus when providing care.

Rest is also important when clinicians have worked overnight and may not feel able to drive home safely.

Hospitals can make a positive impact on the safety of patients, clinicians and road users by providing a suitable environment for rest.

As a minimum, these should include a private, quiet, dark bedroom with clean linen.

The ASA has developed this Position Statement based on current evidence which may be subject to change as more information becomes available. It is intended for anaesthetists in Australia (promulgated 3/5/2023). For the latest version, please visit <https://asa.org.au/position-statements/>.