To the editor:

We read with interest your editorial entitled “Will Physicians Eventually Become Shift Workers?” Apropos to the ideas mentioned there, we would like to mention the email survey we conducted in 2005 of practicing physicians in our area. An IRB approved questionnaire looking at their sleep habits (total sleep time per night, napping, snoring, observed apneas, chronic illness, medication use, caffeine and other substance consumption, and work hours) and an Epworth Sleepiness Scale (ESS) to measure the degree of excessive sleepiness (EDS) was sent by email to the physicians in our area. Out of 861 physicians queried 341 valid responses were received and downloaded into SPSS and analyzed. The non responders did not differ demographically or otherwise from the responders. In our survey 12.5% of subjects had EDS (ESS of 10 or higher) and mean ESS score for all 341 responders was 6. EDS inversely correlated with total sleep time (Pearson’s r = -0.279, p = 0.001). Hours of work per week also inversely correlated with total sleep time (Pearson’s r = -0.158, p = 0.006). No other significant correlations between EDS and other parameters (type of practice, caffeine consumption, alcohol intake, medication use, snoring, observed apneas, chronic illness, sex, marital status, and number of children) were found.

Practicing physicians in our group of responders were not sleepier than the general population where the prevalence of EDS is 9.2% -12%. The main cause of sleepiness appeared to be sleep deprivation which appeared to be related to extended work hours.

REFERENCES


Disclosure Statement

Drs. Attarian and Schuman have indicated no financial conflicts of interest.