

Factors associated with psychiatric morbidity and hazardous alcohol use in Australian doctors

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MJA 2010; 193 (3): 161-166

Abstract

Objective:

To identify factors associated with psychiatric morbidity and hazardous alcohol use in Australian doctors.

Design, setting and participants:

Cross-sectional postal survey of 2999 doctors (including all major specialty groups, trainees and general practitioners) insured with an Australian medical insurance company. The potential for psychiatric morbidity was measured by the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), and the potential for hazardous alcohol use by the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). The survey was conducted in 2007.

Main outcome measures:

Demographic, work-related and personality factors associated with a GHQ score > 4 and an AUDIT score \geq 8.

Results:

Factors significantly associated with psychiatric morbidity in doctors were: having a current medicolegal matter, not taking a holiday in the previous year, working long hours, type of specialty, and having personality traits of neuroticism and introversion. Factors significantly associated with potentially hazardous alcohol use were being male, being Australian-trained, being between 40 and 49 years of age, having personality traits of neuroticism and extroversion, failing to meet

Continuing Medical Education requirements, and being a solo practitioner.

Conclusions:

The mental health of medical practitioners is crucial to the quality of care their patients receive. Doctors should reflect on their hours of work and need for holidays. Involvement with medicolegal processes, such as lawsuits, complaints and inquiries, is a stressful part of medical practice today. Doctors need to be educated about these processes and understand how the experience may affect their health, work and loved ones