DOCTORS.NET.UK RELEASES DATA ON THE IMPACT OF THE LOCUM PAY CAP

New survey finds that locum price caps have already led to staff shortages and rota gaps, with the situation set to worsen after the 1st April deadline.

The survey, answered by 395 qualified doctor members of the professional network Doctors.net.uk, and representing a wide range of specialties, has found that the locum price caps, introduced on 23rd November 2015 have already damaged patient care, with 49% of respondents reporting direct experience of their departments suffering as a consequence.

81% of those surveyed stated that locum caps have already led to staff shortages, with 79% seeing rota gaps. 60% agreed that the locum cap introduction has led to increased waiting times, with staff rallying together to reduce the impact on patients where they can to mitigate against this. Worryingly though, 65% thought that patient care has already been compromised, with hospitals competing for a diminishing number of locums willing work at the decreased rates.

“Our department already has severe gaps in the junior doctor rota and sometimes we have to rely on agency doctors to cover all the roles in the middle grade and junior grade rota on a particular day. Because of the capped rate we are now unsafe in providing patient care.”

DOCTORS.NET.UK MEMBER

Amongst those identifying regular rota gaps within their departments as a result of the locum pay cap, 34% reported daily rota gaps, with a further 48% seeing gaps more than once a week. One anonymous Doctors.net.uk member said: “There are meant to be 9 SHOs on the rota, there are just 5. The other 4 were locums, and left when the pay cap started”.

As part of the government consultation on the potential introduction of the agency rate cap, in October 2015 Doctors.net.uk ran a poll in its forum asking members who currently work as part-time locums (i.e. in addition to a substantive post) to see how the introduction of the locum pay cap would affect them. 37% stated that they would stop doing extra locum shifts. The same poll was repeated last week, and found that this number had risen to 44%. At the lower rate, doctors are no longer willing to sacrifice time with friends and family to take on additional shifts, and hospitals are becoming increasingly concerned, with reports of hospitals sending text messages to their staff requesting cover for specific roles.

The introduction of the pay cap was designed so that hospitals would save money by not being able to pay more than the equivalent hourly NHS pay rate for substantive staff. However, this cost saving is not materialising as financial benefits for the departments themselves, with 88% not seeing any additional funding. 34% report that the locum pay cap has actually cost their departments more, as trusts are able to pay above the capped rates in ‘exceptional circumstances’ for example to fill a rota gap at very short notice. This has resulted in a competitive market in some areas, with hospitals willing to exceed the capped rate attracting locums away from those who won’t. Locums themselves argue that the equivalent rate is intrinsically unfair as they do not receive any of the benefits of being employed in a substantive post such a job security, sick/maternity pay, paid annual leave, attractive pension and study leave.
With the pay cap being reduced further on 1st April, the situation is expected to worsen. 90% of respondents expect it to lead to further staff shortages, and 89% predict more rota gaps. This will be against a background of a decline in trainee numbers, as reported by the Health and Social Care Information Centre on 30th March, and a potential exodus of trainees if the proposed junior doctor contract is imposed in August 2016.

ABOUT DOCTORS.NET.UK

Doctors.net.uk is the largest and most active online professional network for all UK doctors, with over 216,000 members. Doctors are provided with a range of free secure services including an email service, clinical forums, accredited education and medical news which helps them to keep up to date and to easily maintain their continuing professional development (CPD). Each day over 52,000 doctors make use of Doctors.net.uk to network with colleagues and view information.

Doctors.net.uk is part of the M3 Group. M3 operates in Asia, the US and Europe with more than 2.5 million physician doctor members globally via M3.com, MDLinx, Medigate and Doctors.net.uk.

MORE INFORMATION AND CONTACTS

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