

Health workers tired, bullied

BRAD CROUCH

A DEVASTATING exposé of widespread bullying and chronic fatigue among health workers has triggered 27 major recommendations for change, including a trial of a bullying audit tool and an "urgent" rollout of roster monitoring software.

Other proposed solutions include having peak accreditation bodies "assertively address" the issues, including use of their registration powers, and an assessment of all SA Health units

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STEPHEN PATTERSON

for fatigue risk, while introducing a mandatory fatigue risk management system. The parliamentary inquiry found patient safety at risk from health workers in some cases working more than 78 hours a week and a culture that allowed bullying

to flourish. Committee presiding member Stephen Patterson said factors raised as leading to bullying and fatigue included the high-pressure nature of the work, the need for a 24/7 operation, poor workplace culture and staff being discouraged from reporting inappropriate behaviour.

"Workplace fatigue and bullying can create a risk of emotional and physical burn-out among staff," he said.

"The impacts can also stretch beyond the workplace

itself, with one example being the heightened risk of being involved in a road accident when commuting to and from work."

The committee took 88 submissions, heard from 48 witnesses, visited major hospitals and collated reports on the issues. These included an Australian Medical Association audit showing in 2016 that 53 per cent of doctors were working unsafe hours, putting them at significant or higher risk of fatigue. There was also a survey by the SA Salaried Medical

Officers Association, which found 80 per cent of junior doctors reported having had concerns over making clinical errors due to fatigue.

Among senior doctors, 90 per cent reported having suffered from workplace fatigue and more than 70 per cent had felt concerns over making clinical errors due to fatigue.

The committee undertook its own survey of health care workers. Of 2294 respondents, nearly a quarter said they worked 44 or more hours in a

typical week, including 4 per cent over 65 hours.

Almost 60 per cent said they had taken sick leave as a result of fatigue. Three-quarters of respondents reported having witnessed bullying in their current workplace in the past 12 months. Half said they had been subjected to bullying.

Most was at the lower end of the spectrum, such as rude or discourteous behaviour but some workers reported having experienced stalking, threats and physical violence.