Emergency Physicians Frequently Interrupted

Grunt Doc

via CNN, an Australian study on interruptions in the ED:

(CNN) – Interruptions in the emergency room may exact an unhealthy toll on patient care, a group of Australian researchers reported Thursday.

The researchers, from the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales, found that interruptions led emergency department doctors to spend less time on the tasks they were working on and, in nearly a fifth of cases, to give up on the task altogether.

The researchers carried out a time-and-motion study in the emergency department of a 400-bed teaching hospital, observing 40 doctors for more than 210 hours.

So, an average of 5 hrs observation per doc. Not bad, but not exactly an average of a full shift for any EM Physician.

They found that each doctor was typically interrupted 6.6 times per hour; 11 percent of all tasks were interrupted, 3.3 percent of them more than once. They calculated time on task and found that physicians spent less time on interrupted tasks than on uninterrupted tasks. In addition, doctors were multitasking 12.8 percent of the time.

That seems low to me, but my thoughts are anecdotal. Sure, I can spend 30 minutes with no interruptions, then get 3 a minute for what seems like forever.

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