

are not made to wait and waste time unnecessarily. It is also expected that where the facts are so clear it is expected that unnecessary harassment of the members of the medical profession either by way of requests for adjournments or by cross examination should be avoided.

In another judgement (4), it was held that the amount of care, skill and caution expected of a reasonable and prudent medical practitioner in normal times and during an emergency may not be the same.

A three member commission headed by Justice M Jagannadha Rao has drafted a bill (5) pertaining to private hospitals and practitioners and the treatment of accident victims and emergency patients. According to the bill, hospitals cannot refuse care to an accident victim even on the ground that it was a medico-legal case. At the very least, they must provide emergency treatment and transport, with medical support, to another hospital, seeking the help of the police if an ambulance is not available. Doctors or hospital administrators who refuse emergency treatment face six months' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000.

On the whole, irrespective of legal concerns, doctors should not refuse emergency treatment, at least on moral grounds.

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Occupational health problems from "standing jobs"

The shopping complexes or malls that are being set up all over this country are creating new occupational health hazards. Enter a mall in any city today and the sales persons will be standing, waiting to serve you. There is a belief that standing to serve

is part of their job. We do not stop to think about the fact that these people stand for eight to ten hours every day at work.

When I once went to the ladies' room in a big branded mall, the woman whose job it was to keep the toilet clean was complaining to her co-worker that she wanted to quit her job. Before coming to work, she cooked and did other household tasks. After standing the whole day at work, she was exhausted and found it difficult to take care of her children. She told me that her monthly pay was Rs 3,000.

The situation of those working in malls in the sales section is similar. Workers with jobs that require standing for long periods, without access to a chair, are far more likely to be relatively poorly paid.

There are many health problems caused by prolonged standing. It can cause soft tissue injuries, swollen or painful feet and legs, planter fasciitis, varicose veins, knee problems, low back pain, neck and shoulder stiffness, poor posture (and its effects), restricted blood flow, muscle soreness and fatigue. It can increase the chances of developing knee or hip arthritis. In the case of pregnant women, prolonged standing for more than three hours at a time increases the chances of pre-term delivery and reduced birth weight.

Such health problems caused by prolonged standing are greater when the person cannot move around much, or when it involves working on hard surfaces and/or wearing unsuitable footwear. Saleswomen in malls are expected to wear heels and this unsuitable footwear itself causes many health problems. Heels more than five cm high can force the body forward and the buttocks back because in order to keep their balance, women have to tense up and lean slightly back. This can cause shortened calf muscles and knee and back problems and increase the chances of falling.

However, workers may be reluctant to occasionally sit down at work; for fear that this will be interpreted as laziness by managers, or rudeness by customers.

Small changes at the work station can make it possible to reduce the requirement to stand. People who work at such jobs can be provided a stool to sit on and rest periodically. Salespersons should be allowed to wear low heeled footwear. They should also be allowed to move around when they are not dealing with customers.

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NOTE

The Clinical Trials Watch (CTW) factsheet is based on data downloaded every six months from the Clinical Trials Registry-India, and has been published in the October 2009, April 2010 and October 2010 issues of IJME. CTW is compiled by the Centre for Studies in Ethics and Rights, Mumbai. At the time of compiling the factsheet to be published in the April 2011 issue of the journal, it was noticed that the CTR-I had made changes to, and cleaned, the data in the registry. CTW will be printed in the July 2011 issue, after accounting for all these changes.