

Male doctors more likely to be disciplined for misconduct

May 1 2011

Male doctors are four times more likely than female doctors to be disciplined for misconduct, and sexual misconduct is the most common reason for disciplinary action, a University of Melbourne, Australia study has found.

Lead author, Ms Katie Elkin from the School of Population Health at the University of Melbourne said obstetrician-gynaecologists and psychiatrists had the highest rate of disciplinary action, followed by general practitioners.

"This study provides for the first time, an accurate picture of the cases in which tribunals in Australia and New Zealand have found doctors guilty of misconduct," she said.

"Previously, public perceptions in this area were largely based upon media reporting of particular scandals."

Published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* today, the study analysed disciplinary cases before tribunals in five jurisdictions (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and New Zealand) in 2000-2009. These jurisdictions encompass 85 per cent of doctors registered in Australia and all doctors registered to practice in New Zealand.

Sexual misconduct was the primary type of misconduct in 24 per cent of cases handled by tribunals, followed by unethical or illegal prescribing,

which accounted for 21 per cent of cases.

Other types of misconduct included missed diagnosis, breach of registration conditions and failure to obtain informed consent.

In 43 per cent of cases, tribunals ruled to remove the doctor from practice.

Of the 485 cases analysed, eight per cent involved patient death and an additional nine per cent involved physical harm to patients.

"These findings indicate that boards and tribunals interpret their public protection role fairly broadly. Regulators are not sitting back – they are trying to be proactive when professional misconduct poses risks to the community, even in the absence of physical harm" Ms Elkin said.

Professor David Studdert, a co-author and leader of the research team at the University of Melbourne said improving public understanding of these cases was important.

"Without that, anecdotes and media reports can lead to quite a distorted perspective," he said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

Citation: Male doctors more likely to be disciplined for misconduct (2011, May 1) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-05-male-doctors-misbehave.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--