

# Research into health and performance of older doctors

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University of Melbourne research found doctors aged 65 years of age and older had 37 per cent more notifications (complaints/concerns) lodged against them than younger doctors (36-60 years) over a four-year

period.

The research was led by Associate Professor Marie Bismark from the University's Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, and published in the *Journal of Patient Safety and Risk Management*.

Associate Professor Bismark analysed 12,878 notifications lodged with Australian medical regulators from all registered [doctors](#) in clinical practice in Australia, aged 36-60 and >65 years, between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2014.

Doctors aged 60-65 in 2010 were excluded from the analysis as they crossed over from the younger age group to the older age group during the study period.

"Many senior doctors provide high-quality care well beyond the traditional age of retirement, with the vast majority (older: 86.8 per cent versus younger: 84.2 per cent) of older doctors in our study not subject to any complaints or notifications," Associate Professor Bismark said.

"However, as a group, our research showed that health-related notifications were two times higher among older doctors, and 40 per cent higher for conduct-related notifications."

The types of notification varied between the two groups, with older doctors at higher risk for notifications relating to physical or cognitive impairment, records and reports, prescribing or supplying medicines, disruptive behaviour and treatment.

"Our results suggest that patient care may be affected by changes in doctors' cognitive and physical health resulting in notifications to the medical regulator," Associate Professor Bismark said.

"We identified key 'hot spots' of risk for older doctors, which suggests that ongoing professional assessment, education and support is needed to ensure high clinical practice standard are maintained.

Knowledge of this will help enhance [patient care](#) and ensure public safety."

Younger doctors had higher notification rates relating to mental illness and substance abuse, and problems with procedures.

"Again, this highlights the importance of being aware of areas of increased complaint risk so the medical profession can provide appropriate support," said Associate Professor Bismark.

**More information:** Laura A Thomas et al. Health, performance and conduct concerns among older doctors: A retrospective cohort study of notifications received by medical regulators in Australia, *Journal of Patient Safety and Risk Management* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/2516043518763181](#)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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