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Doctors give better care in the morning – 15th May, 2019

Level 4

The quality of medical care you get could depend on the time of the day you visit a hospital. A U.S. study found big differences in the decision-making of doctors at different times of the day. The chances of getting screened for cancer were higher in the morning than in the late afternoon. Around 64% of women eligible for tests were assigned to breast cancer screening in the hour after 8am. This figure dropped to 48% at 5pm.

The researchers said many doctors suffered from "decision fatigue". This is a mental burn-out that affects the ability to make decisions after hours of work. A researcher said there was "growing evidence that the time of the day and decision fatigue impacts patient care". Another researcher said decision fatigue means people may be less likely to make a new decision after they've been making them all day. This was often the result of being overworked.

Level 5

The quality of care you get from doctors could depend on the time of the day you visit a hospital. A study from a university in the USA found a big difference in the decision-making of physicians at different times of the day. The study concluded that our chances of getting screened for cancer were a lot higher in the morning than in the late afternoon. Researchers investigated the number of women assigned to breast cancer screening. They found that in the hour after 8am, doctors ordered screenings for 64% of women who were eligible for tests. This figure dropped to 48% at 5pm.

The researchers said the reduction in screenings as the day progressed could be due to "decision fatigue" - a mental burn-out that interrupts a person's ability to make decisions the longer they work. A researcher said his study added to, "the growing evidence that the time of the day and decision fatigue impacts patient care". Another researcher agreed, saying: "The downward trend of ordering screenings may be the result of decision fatigue, where people may be less inclined to consider a new decision after they've been making them all day." She also blamed overworked doctors.

Level 6

The quality of medical care you receive from doctors could depend on the time of the day you visit a hospital or clinic. A study from the University of Pennsylvania in the USA discovered a significant difference in the decision-making of physicians at different times of the day. The study concluded that a patient's chances of getting screened for cancer were a lot higher in the morning than they were in the late afternoon. Researchers investigated the numbers of women assigned to breast cancer screening throughout the day. They found that in the hour following 8am, doctors ordered screenings for 64 per cent of women who were eligible for tests. This figure dropped to 48 per cent at 5pm.

The researchers said the progressive reduction in assigned screenings as the day progressed could be due to "decision fatigue". This is a kind of mental burn-out that interrupts a person's ability to effectively make decisions the longer they work. Dr. Mitesh Patel said: "Our new study adds to the growing evidence that the time of the day and decision fatigue impacts patient care." Researcher Esther Hsiang agreed, saying: "We believe that the downward trend of ordering screenings may be the result of decision fatigue, where people may be less inclined to consider a new decision after they've been making them all day. It may also stem from overloaded clinicians getting behind as the day progresses."