Introduction: The effects of continuous work hours on physician performance in Canada have received much attention recently, most notably in residents with the recent arbitration decision in Quebec. Previous investigations have shown the effects of work hours on resident and patient safety. This has been balanced against increased patient handover with shorter continuous working hours and the need for training in handover. However, there is little Canadian data on resident work hours, resident perceptions of the effect on patient safety of work hours and handover training.

Methods: REB approval was received and participants provided consent before entering the study. A series of questions were developed by a national working group of residents based on gaps in the existing literature about work hours, the effect of work hours on patient safety and handover training. The survey was distributed to all residents in Canada except Quebec.

Results: 1796 residents participated in the survey, representing 22% of eligible respondents. Residents reported working an average of 66h per week (standard deviation 16). 82% of respondents reported that the quality of care they had provided had suffered because of lack of sleep. 67% of respondents felt they could safely provide care safely after 16h of continuous work or less. 30% of respondents felt excessive work hours compromised the care they provided “often” or “very often”.

Only 52% of respondents had received training in handover, the most common method was informal modeling from senior residents or attending. Of those who had received training 72% felt it had improved their ability to provide safe care.

Discussion: This study shows the work burden faced by residents and the shocking frequency with which residents view quality of care being impaired by work hours. A majority of residents feel continuous working hours should be limited to 16h or less. Surprisingly, in spite of the recent attention on increased handover, training in handover is infrequent and rarely formalised. These results highlight the urgency of reviewing work hours for residents and ensuring appropriate training in handover skills to ensure safe care for patients.