

Simulators key to doctor training

Doctors should spend more time training on simulators, England's chief medical officer says.

Sir Liam Donaldson said that a greater use of technology at every stage of training could save lives.

But he said it was not just about hi-tech computer simulators as using manikins to practise putting a drip on an arm could also help.

Doctors agreed technology should be embraced more, but added there was no substitute for on-the-job training.

“ A surgeon trained on a simulator is twice as fast and twice as accurate as one who has not been ”

Sir Liam Donaldson, Chief Medical Officer

Simulators are already used in the NHS for everything from practising surgery to administering drugs.

But unlike other countries, such as Israel, there are no strict guidelines about how much time doctors should spend on them.

As part of a series of proposals Sir Liam put forward in his annual report, he called for a national centre for simulation.

He pointed out that there was one training simulator for every 300 pilots, compared to just one for every 7,300 doctors.

Sir Liam said: "A surgeon trained on a simulator is twice as fast and twice as accurate as one who has not been.

"It reduces errors, making surgery much safer.

"Simulation works and the NHS must be able to provide it to make a difference to patients."

Real life training

Dr Andy Thornley, chairman of the British Medical Association's junior doctors committee, said more investment in training was essential in light of the EU working time directive.

"At a time when many junior doctors are worried about the implications of reduced working hours on training, the addition of high-tech training facilities would be welcomed."

But he added: "While simulations have a role to play there is no substitute for real life training with an experienced consultant, something that seems to have been forgotten in the NHS. "

Sir Liam's report also covered a range of other topics, including pain management.

Guidelines suggest there should be one full-time pain specialist for every 100,000 people, but at the moment there is just one per 250,000.

Sir Liam said that there should be a greater focus on the issue as a third of the 7.8m who live with chronic pain complain about inadequate pain control.

As well as increasing staffing levels, he wants improvements in training and monitoring.

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