

## EMOS statement on

### Recognising the Medical Profession as an Arduous Occupation

Doctors are essential to the functioning and resilience of every European health system. Yet the conditions under which they work are increasingly characterised by physical strain, psychological pressure, organisational stress, and moral and legal responsibility that cumulatively place a significant burden on their health and well-being.

A clear, comprehensive definition of what constitutes arduous work for physicians can help foster a common European understanding.

According to this definition,

*“A physician’s arduous work is the professional activity whose organisation of working hours—particularly shifts and night work—, the intensity and frequency of the workload, and/or the medical responsibility connected with the profession, determine, in a continuous or recurrent manner, a significant risk to the doctor’s physical and mental health.”<sup>1</sup>*

In practical terms, this means that the medical profession meets internal criteria used to define both arduous and hazardous occupation due to exposure of doctors to irregular and prolonged working hours, night and shift duties, chronic sleep disruption, sustained exposure to biological, chemical, and physical risks, combined with high cognitive, emotional, and decisional demands.

Recognising the arduous nature of medical work is not a symbolic act but a public health measure. Protecting physicians’ health directly contributes to patient safety, continuity of care, and the long-term sustainability of healthcare systems.

For these reasons, European and national authorities are invited to initiate a coordinated and structured process to translate this definition into operational criteria, measurable indicators, and concrete policy actions. Priority areas for doctors include:

- revising work schedules and shift organisation;
- ensuring age- and gender-specific needs so as to prevent adverse effects on health;
- developing early-retirement or correction mechanisms aligned with other high-risk professions;
- implementing effective systems of psychological and occupational health support;
- ensuring adequate staffing and functional digital systems to avoid unnecessary burden.

Recognising the medical profession as arduous profession is an act of responsibility toward the professionals who safeguard public health every day. Improving the sustainability of medical work is essential not only to protect physicians but also to maintain the capacity, quality, and attractiveness of healthcare systems for current and future generations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Improving resilience in the Medical Profession: FEMS Policy Paper on Physicians’ Arduous Work*, October 2025