

# Editorial

## Work-interval system in Japan

Long working hours in Japan have been seriously blamed inside and outside the country for deaths and disorders due to cerebrovascular/cardiovascular diseases and mental disorders, i.e., Karoshi<sup>1)</sup>. Thus, several measures and policies have been carried out to reduce working hours. As of 2019, the Japanese government implemented legislation to set the maximum overtime, in principle, at 45 h per month and 360 h per year. Depending on circumstances at work, these limits can be extended to more than 45 h per month for a total of six months and 720 h per year if overtime including holiday work is less than 100 h in a single month and/or an average of 80 h for two to six months.

In addition to the reform of working hours, the government is seeking to introduce a work-interval system, which secures the protected time period of non-work until the start of the next work, similar to the daily rest period specified by the European Working Time Directive<sup>2)</sup>. This endeavor is expected to promote recovery from work fatigue, sleep, and other activities during non-work time. Empirical findings support the beneficial roles of the work-interval system on sleep, recovery, mental health, and blood pressure<sup>3–6)</sup>.

Currently, occupational truck, bus, and taxi drivers in Japan are required to have an off-duty period of at least 8 h<sup>7)</sup>. This regulation is being revised to have a minimum off-duty period of 9 h, preferably 11 h. In the aviation industry, civil aviation pilots must take a rest period of 10 h before the next flight, which can be lengthened to 12 h when the flight schedule covers less than 2 h during the Window of Circadian Low (WOCL, 2:00–5:59) and to 14 h when the flight schedule includes more than 2 h during the WOCL. Moreover, air traffic controllers have to leave at least 11 h between shifts. In the medical field, physicians who work overtime up to 960 h a year will be recommended to have at least 9-h rest after a day shift and 18-h rest after a night shift starting from 2024. However, it will be obligatory for physicians working overtime for 1,860 h a year to comply with the same requirements.

For other occupations, the Japanese government proposes 9–11 h of rest from clock-out to clock-in. National statis-

tics show that only 6% of the industries surveyed in 2022 introduced the work-interval system, although the percentage has increased since 2017 (1.4%)<sup>8, 9)</sup>. Several types of promotional activities have been conducted to increase awareness of the system above.

No one denies the importance of a non-work time that covers essential behaviors such as eating, communicating with family members, bathing, and of course sleeping. We believe that dual strategies for shortening the working hours and promoting the work-interval system will improve the working conditions in Japan to promote the health, safety, and productivity of employees.

### References

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**Masaya TAKAHASHI**  
Deputy Editor, Industrial Health