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## Poor standards in A&E 'becoming norm'

**Katie Gibbons**

Every major accident and emergency unit in England fails to have at least one consultant on duty at all times, MPs say.

The Commons health select committee has criticised some hospital trusts for allowing poor performance to "become the norm" in A&E departments as the NHS faces a winter predicted to be more difficult than the last.

A report published today warns that hospitals face unprecedented challenges in the coming months with increasing demand for services, trusts suffering due to lack of staff and a widespread

inability to move out patients who are medically fit to be discharged.

A&E departments across the country are now routinely missing the national target to deal with 95 per cent of patients within four hours, evidence submitted to the MPs' inquiry shows.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine warned that in the 176 major A&E units meant to provide 24-hour care for more than 40,000 patients each day, there are "insufficient consultants in post to provide even one on duty ... for even 16 hours per day".

If the number of doctors had kept pace with the number of admissions in

recent years, there would now be 8,074 doctors working in A&E rather than 5,300, the college said. Tajek Hassan, president of the college, which recommends having up to ten consultants on duty in A&E at any one time, said that "the system cannot go on like this".

MPs said: "The ongoing decline in performance of type 1 emergency departments against the four-hour target should be regarded as a matter of patient safety rather than a failure to meet a bureaucratic objective."

They added: "The decline in performance usually associated with winter has become the norm for some."