

One of the lessons learned in World War I and again after the collapse of France in 1940 was that excessively long hours of work do not ultimately pay, even when considered solely on the basis of output and apart from the effect on health. . . . All of the available evidence from England and this country indicates that working hours in operations involving a fair amount of physical effort should not exceed 60-65 per week for men, and 55-60 per week for women.

A committee representing the Army, Navy, Public Health Service, War Manpower Commission, Labor Department and other agencies had agreed in 1942 concerning either male or female civilians that "one scheduled day of rest for the individual approximately every 7 days should be a universal and invariable rule."²⁹

The Army Medical Department was therefore obviously exceeding all accepted safety limits in requiring a routine 72 hours a week and frequently 84 or 100 hours, and a 7-day week. On the other hand, the Army was in a somewhat different position from civilian agencies. Since it was entitled to ask a man's life in combat, it appeared equally entitled to ask that a woman sacrifice her health if required. There was a strong feeling in the Medical Department that any special regulations or labor laws concerning hours or type of work for women constituted discrimination; also, many Army doctors did not believe that any real damage to health would result. A representative of The Surgeon General stated, in refusing to accept the assignment of a WAC staff director for the Medical Department:

Some think that there has been entirely too much said on the subject of the physical capabilities of males vs. females and I can only say that I don't think any of them work as hard as they will when they become housewives and mothers.³⁰

Director Hobby's recommendation, after she had considered the survey, was that any sacrifice was justified, either of health or life, if a true emergency required it; but that, since commanders did not deliberately kill men unnecessarily, the WAC should not unnecessarily sacrifice women's health. As a means of determining whether a true emergency existed, she proposed that the hours worked by Army nurses be considered the criterion. If nurses were not busy enough to require extended hours, and if the situation continued over months and years, there obviously was no emergency but rather a failure of hospital commanders to take aggressive action to improve personnel management. She therefore proposed that WAC and Nurse Corps hours be identical. This theory met with the general disapproval of hospital commanders, and was not to be acceptable for many months.

There was thus by the end of the summer of 1944 considerable doubt in WAC authorities' minds as to whether women should properly be employed at all in hospitals on an enlisted status, but should not instead be hired as civilians on a 48-hour week and with the privilege of quitting if overtaxed, a move that would also avoid the one-for-one replacement problem. To this was added the ethical question of whether recruiters were any longer justified in making commitments as to technical assignments which quite possibly would not be fulfilled.

Cessation of Medical Department Recruiting

Any such decision was postponed when, in late September of 1944, WAC recruiters

²⁹ (1) Baetjer, *Women in Industry*. (2) Helen Baker, *Women in War Industries* (Princeton University Press, 1942).

³⁰ Memo, Col Durward G. Hall, SGO, for Col Whitehurst, 15 Nov 44. SGO Hist Div 220.1 WAC.