



Job stress

FOR the past three years, investment banker Andy has been plagued by nightmares due to stress from 14-hour work days. Three weeks ago, he decided to quit.

"Work affected my mental and physical health so much, it was just not worth it," says Andy, 29, who declines to give his full name as he is serving his notice of resignation.

His case is not uncommon, say doctors and human resource experts. More young professionals are ending up with medical problems – including insomnia, depression and hypertension – because of extra-long work hours.

General practitioner Quek Koh Choon has seen his patients in their 20s and 30s suffering from depression, and says that many of them work as teachers, bankers and engineers.

This is in contrast to a decade ago, when most of his patients with depression were the elderly who felt lost and lonely after retiring.

Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist at Gleneagles Medical Centre in Singapore, says burnout from work should not be taken lightly.

"It can deteriorate to full blown depressive or anxiety disorders, with severe symptoms such as feelings of hopelessness and suicidal thoughts," he says.

The problem is exacerbated when there is a manpower crunch. Fewer employees means workers end up with more responsibilities.

Human resource experts say some of the stress comes from the strong desire of young professionals to prove themselves.

Benjamin, an auditor at a major accounting firm, puts in at least 12 hours a day, six days a week.

He says his company has a "work-around-the-clock" culture and labour laws do not protect managers and executives from having to put in excessive hours.

The answer, for some, may be to switch jobs. But it is not an easy decision. Andy says he struggled with the decision to quit his job at a foreign bank for a year and is now thinking of working as a property agent or a teacher.

"Having more time for myself and my family is more important," he says. – ST/ANN