

Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

Registered Nurses' Experiences Taking Restorative Breaks on Night Shift: A Qualitative Analysis

Tullamora T. Landis, PhD, RN-BC, CNL

College of Nursing, Washington State University, Spokane, WA, USA

Night shift nurses experience problems with circadian misalignment which may impact performance and patient outcomes. Fatigue mitigation strategies can include deliberate use of restful work breaks, using naps, and caffeine. However, nurses have reported frequently missing break opportunities and the rationale for missed breaks remains unclear. As the shift progresses, night shift nurses experience greater difficulties with performance and sleepiness. Increased risk of medication errors has also been reported for 12-hours nurses compared to 8-hour nurses. Such hazards have been well-documented in the literature and can have direct impact on patient care outcomes and nurses' well-being. Therefore, strategies to reduce risks to patients and workers' health are needed and the current literature does not accurately describe the reasons why nurses are not able to take restorative or restful breaks during their shift

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to describe and interpret the lived experience of nurses taking breaks on night shift in a hospital environment and the meaning of this phenomenon as it relates to the workplace.

Methods: Registered nurses (n=16) from a United States community hospital were interviewed using the research methodology of interpretive phenomenology. Data was analyzed by multiple researchers and nursing experts until consensus on emerging themes was reached.

Results: Identified themes included 1) breaks as a time to eat and socialize, 2) breaks as inconsistently supported by unit-level structures and processes, and 3) breaks as a luxury, not a right.

Conclusion: Nurses in this study report absence of consistent and restorative breaks. Organizations should analyze gaps in systems and processes to optimize a consistent, restorative nature of the break experience among nurses working night shift. Break policies appear to be the norm for nurses working in the hospital-setting yet break support for night shift workers does not appear to be consistent. A change in culture regarding breaks may be needed to empower nurses to participate in restorative breaks. Evidence suggests that taking regular, restorative breaks may improve the overall health of night shift nurses. Nurses in our study report a desire to take restorative breaks but may need support from organizational and unit-specific leaders to address unique night shift barriers.

Title:

Registered Nurses' Experiences Taking Restorative Breaks on Night Shift: A Qualitative Analysis

Keywords:

night shift, qualitative research and restorative breaks

Abstract Summary:

Night shift nurses have reported frequently missing breaks. The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experience of nurses taking breaks on night shift. Identified themes included 1) breaks as a time to eat, 2) breaks as inconsistently supported, and 3) breaks as a luxury, not a right.

References:

- Baron, K. G., & Reid, K. J. (2014). Circadian misalignment and health. *International review of psychiatry (Abingdon, England)*, 26(2), 139–154. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09540261.2014.911149>
- Caruso, C.C., 2014. Negative impacts of shiftwork and long work hours. *Rehabil. Nurs.* 39 (1), 16–25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/rnj.107>.
- Flo, E., Pallesen, S., Moen, B.E., Wage, S., & Bjorvatn, B. (2014). Short rest periods between work shifts predict sleep and health problems in nurses at 1-year follow-up. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 71(8), 555–561. <https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2013-102007>
- Rogers, A. E., Hwang, W.-T. D., & Scott, L. (2004). The Effects of Work Breaks on Staff Nurse Performance. *JONA: The Journal of Nursing Administration*, 34(11), 512–519. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005110-200411000-00007>
- Wilson, M., Permito, R., English, A., Albritton, S., Coogle, C., & Van Dongen, H. P. A. (2019). Performance and sleepiness in nurses working 12-h day shifts or night shifts in a community hospital. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 126(October 2017), 43–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2017.09.023>

First Primary Presenting Author***Primary Presenting Author***

Tullamora T. Landis, PhD, RN-BC, CNL
Washington State University
College of Nursing
Assistant Professor
Spokane, Washington
USA

Author Summary: Tullamora Landis, PhD, RN-BC, CNL achieved her Bachelors in Nursing from Seattle Pacific University, her Masters in Nursing from the University of Washington and doctorate at the College of Nursing at Washington State University. Her research interests include the professional identity in nursing nurses, the nursing workforce and nursing education.