A Shiftwork Education Program: Translating Non-Healthcare Evidence to Improve Nurse and Patient Safety

Mary Lawson Carney DNP, RN-BC, CCRN, CNE
Associate State Director of Nursing: WGU Indiana
Psi Upsilon Chapter
mary.carney@wgu.edu
Objectives

- Describe fatigue as a physiological mechanism and the ‘culture of fatigue’ in healthcare
- Identify risks to patients and nurses caused by shiftwork-related fatigue
- Describe elements of a shiftwork education program suitable to the healthcare environment.
What is fatigue?

A loss of physiological and psychological function resulting from:

- Extended wakefulness
- Heavy workload (physical or mental)
- Excessive stimulation or stress
Fatigue – and its major symptom excessive sleepiness, is recognized in *law and regulation* as a:

- Significant body impairment
- Source of ill health
- Accident and injury risk

- Martin Moore-Ede PhD, MD
- The Twenty-Four Hour Society
Fatigue Characteristics

- Loss of situational awareness - inability to connect-the-dots
- Slowed reaction times
- Can mimic psychosis
- Increased rate of errors
- Impaired performance
- Diminished capacity to communicate effectively
**Oxygen tubing erroneously connected to a needleless IV port**

**Potential for Harm**

**High**

**Case Study**

- A patient’s oxygen tubing became disconnected from his nebulizer and was accidentally reattached to his IV tubing Y-site by a staff member who was completing a double shift.
- The patient died from an air embolism, even though the connection was broken within seconds.

**The Joint Commission Safety Tip**

*Identify and manage conditions and practices that may contribute to healthcare worker fatigue, and take appropriate action.*
The Culture of Fatigue in Healthcare

- Altruism
- Martyrdom
“The average functional level of any sleep-deprived individual is comparable to the 9th percentile of non-sleep deprived individuals.”

–Circadian White Paper
Clinical decision regret is closely linked to health care worker fatigue.

-Linda Scott PhD, RN
Fatigued workers make five times more serious errors across ALL INDUSTRIES.

-Circadian Technologies
What we can learn from non-healthcare industries

Aviation

- Mandated training on sleep, fatigue and fatigue countermeasures
- Attestation of ‘fitness for duty’
- Take action if someone is unfit for duty and the duty to report

Ground transportation

- Legislation determines length of shift, hours worked per day, hours off between shifts
- Out of compliance operators are subject to license revocation and criminal prosecution
Adaptable for both prelicensure students and practicing professionals alike.

Place this crucial information on par with other safety-related topics like sharps, blood borne pathogens, and ergonomic injury.
Key Components

- Physiology of sleep and circadian rhythms
- Sleep hygiene practices
- Nutrition and fitness strategies for shift workers
- Safe driving after night shifts
- Evidence-based scheduling
- Families of shift workers
- Recognizing fatigue in yourself and others
- The risk of a fatigued work force
- Personal responsibility and the cultural norm of fatigue
Let’s start treating fatigue like the sentinel event that it is!