**Fatigue Can Be A Major Hazard for Staff and Residents**

**2020 Special Edition**

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***Editor’s Note:***

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*In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions and feedback to:*

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With the measures that are being implemented to provide care and service for residents during this time of COVID-19 concerns, taxing the staff’s capabilities can increase their exposure to injury and resident’s welfare. When your welfare or life is in someone else’s hands, you want that someone to be alert. Numerous studies have shown fatigue to be a serious problem, including a recent study by the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing that concluded fatigue can “result in expensive job turnover, and can negatively affect patient care.”

To prevent nurse and staff fatigue, here are a few facts about the problem, and a few tips on how to address it.

**What Is Fatigue?**

Fatigue is not sleepiness. It is a feeling of persistent exhaustion or weariness that makes it difficult to focus on and/or perform tasks. Occasional, mild fatigue is common for everyone and no reason for alarm; but persistent fatigue can lead to serious problems for nurses, jeopardize a patient’s safety, and put employers at risk.

Fatigue can cause:

* Slowed reaction time
* Medication errors
* Inability to convey empathy
* Errors of omission
* Compromised problem-solving
* Failure to rescue
* Poor-quality patient care
* Poor teamwork
* Lapses in attention to detail

**What Causes Fatigue?**

The primary cause of all fatigue—in nurse practitioners and others—is inadequate sleep. Many nurses struggle to get enough sleep because their work schedules often interfere with the natural pattern of nightly rest. In addition, the stresses of a nursing career can make sleep difficult.

**What Can Be Done to Reduce Nurse Fatigue?**

Both nurses and those who employ them can take steps to reduce the problem of fatigue.

**Nurses can:**

* Prioritize sleep, making every effort to get enough despite work schedules.
* Participate in physical activities outside of work such as jogging, walking, weight training, or swimming.
* Keep a regular eating schedule and eat healthy foods such as whole grains, fruits, nuts, and lean proteins.
* Stay hydrated and avoid the overconsumption of caffeine.
* Maintain an active social and/or family life.
* Avoid medications that can cause drowsiness and keep alcohol consumption to a minimum.
* Take breaks and lunch in a quiet area, if possible.
* Monitor personal health for signs of fatigue.
* If fatigued, make an effort to take time off to recharge.

**Nurse employers can:**

* Design work schedules that reduce the risk of fatigue, limiting scheduling changes and using 12-hour shifts judiciously.
* Limit the number of consecutive days nurses can work, particularly if nurses are working 12-hour shifts.
* Maintain adequate staffing levels.
* Not require mandatory overtime and limit the use of voluntary overtime, even for recent nursing school graduates.
* Schedule staff meetings so they don’t require anyone to get up early or stay up late.
* Provide staff education on the risks of nurse fatigue and the importance of sleep.
* When reviewing negative outcomes, investigate the possible role of fatigue.

Resource: Walden University