

Nursing practice and work environment

Collaborating to address the risks of nurse fatigue

By Jaime Murphy Dawson, MPH

IN NOVEMBER 2014, ANA released a new position statement that calls for stronger collaboration between registered nurses (RNs) and employers to address nurse fatigue and emphasizes strengthening a culture of safety in the work environment. The document, titled “Addressing Nurse Fatigue to Promote Safety and Health: Joint Responsibilities of Registered Nurses and Employers to Reduce Risks,” outlines evidence-based strategies to ensure safety for RNs and patients.

ANA President Pamela Cipriano, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, outlined the scope of the problem. “Research shows that prolonged work hours can hinder a nurse’s performance and have negative impacts on patients’ safety and outcomes,” said Cipriano. “We’re concerned not only with greater likelihood for errors, diminished problem solving, slower reaction time, and other performance deficits related to fatigue, but also with dangers posed to nurses’ own health.”

The new document replaces two 2006 position statements, written separately for RNs and employers, to clearly articulate joint responsibilities. The document states: “Registered nurses and employers in all care settings must collaborate to reduce the risks of nurse fatigue and sleepiness associated with shift work and long work hours. Evidence-based strategies must be implemented to proactively address nurse fatigue and sleepiness; to promote the health, safety, and wellness of registered nurses; and to ensure optimal patient outcomes.”

A background section is included, detailing the tremendous amount of research linking shift work and long work hours to health effects for nurses and diminished quality of care. Following this section are lists of evidence-based recommendations that RNs and employers can adopt to counter the risks of nurse fatigue. Examples of recommendations include:

- involving nurses in the design of work schedules and using a regular and predictable schedule so nurses can plan for work and personal responsibilities
- limiting work weeks to 40 hours within 7 days and work shifts to 12 hours
- establishing at least 10 consecutive hours per day of protected time off duty in order for nurses to obtain 7 to 9 hours of sleep
- eliminating the use of mandatory overtime as a “staffing solution”

Steering committee members

ANA wishes to recognize these individuals for their leadership:

Claire Caruso, PhD, RN, FAAN (co-chair)

Ann Rogers, PhD, RN, FAAN (co-chair)

James Allard, MSN, RN, NEA-BC

Ann Berger, PhD, APRN, AOCNS, FAAN

Anne Claire Compton, BSN, RN

Ella Flournoy, BSN, RN, CCRN-CSC

Scott Goodsite, ADN, RN

Barbara Hobbs, PhD, RN, NEA-BC

Claire Leback, BSN, RN

Kathryn Lee, PhD, RN, CBSM, FAAN

Joanne Matthew, MSN, RN, PMHCNS, BC

Jaime Potopinski, MSN, MBA, RN

R. John Repique, MS, RN, NEA-BC

Linda Scott, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN

Melody A. Seitz, MS, RNC-OB

- promoting frequent, uninterrupted rest breaks during work shifts and facilitating the use of naps during scheduled breaks.

The document also lists strategies to help RNs improve the quality of their sleep, maintain health, and prevent drowsy driving. Additionally, related ANA publications and initiatives are summarized, such as HealthyNurse™, the *Code of Ethics for Nurses*, and ANA’s 2012 Staffing Principles.

The position statement was developed by ANA’s Professional Issues Panel on Nurse Fatigue and adopted by the ANA Board of Directors. The steering committee consisted of 15 ANA members with expertise on the issue. (See *Steering committee members*.) Additional guidance was received from an advisory committee of more than 350 members. A public comment period also was conducted, and more than 200 comments were received from RNs and representatives from healthcare facilities, state nursing organizations, national nursing organizations, universities, and federal agencies.

To access the new position statement and ANA resources (including a video, a CE, and webinars), please visit www.nursingworld.org/Fatigue. ★

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