
Nurses' Sleep Deprivation Impacts Patient Outcomes



Before work days, nurses sleep 83 minutes fewer than on their days off, which negatively impacts patient safety and care. According to a new study (Witkoski Stimpfel et al. 2019) published in *Sleep Health*, the journal of the National Sleep Foundation (USA), nurses get under 7 hours of sleep prior to their shifts.

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Nurses' work schedule is based on shifts, especially in hospitals. Such arrangement affects a worker's circadian rhythms and can compromise both their health and performance. Furthermore, many work 12-hour shifts and often have to work overtime to complete all the tasks. With time to commute and to manage household duties added to the above, not much time is left for nurses to sleep before or between shifts. This eventually leads to sleep deprivation, which may hinder performance when handling complex and stressful tasks. For nurses, it may cause critical mistakes in administering medication or making clinical decisions.

The researchers at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing looked into how nurses' sleep patterns influenced quality of care and patient safety. They used data from two surveys (from 2015 and 2016) of 1,568 registered nurses related to sleep duration and work characteristics.

Before a nonwork day, the reported time of sleep exceeded 8 hours (497 minutes). Prior to a work shift it was, on average, just under 7 hours (414 minutes), which is 83 minutes less than the former and less than recommended amounts. The study associated short sleep duration with lower measures of patient safety and quality of care. This has consequences on both individual and organisational levels as patient safety may be compromised in part by tired, overworked nurses.

The study concluded that sleep deprivation before work negatively affected nurses' health and performance. Highlighting the need for further research, the authors suggested interventions to support nurses' sleep to improve patient care, such as evidence-based scheduling strategies and limit the use of overtime.

References

Witkoski Stimpfel A, Fatehi F, Kovner Ch (2019) Nurses' sleep, work hours, and patient care quality, and safety. *Sleep Health*. In Press. Available from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2352721819302244>

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