

Sweden Experiments with Six Hour Nursing Shifts



A small group of elderly-care nurses in Sweden have made changes to their work schedule in order to improve quality and efficiency. The nurses have switched from an eight hour to six hour working day for the same wage. This is the first controlled trial of shorter hours in Sweden. The nurses who are part of this change feel that they are much more alert and have more energy both in the workplace and at home.

The success of the Svartedalens experiment has motivated other hospitals to follow suit. Gothenburg's Sahlgrenska University hospital has also moved to a six-hour day in its orthopaedic surgery department. Two hospital departments in Umeå have also done the same. Even some small businesses who work shorter days feel that the change has increased their productivity and reduced staff turnover.

While shorter work-days have increased the number of staff members and have increased costs, overall the wellbeing of the staff is better and the standard of care has improved.

“For a long time politicians have been competing to say we must create more jobs with longer hours – work has become an end in itself,” says Roland Paulsen, a researcher in business administration at the University of Lund. “But productivity has doubled since the 1970s, so technically we even have the potential for a four-hour working day. It is a question of how these productivity gains are distributed. It did not used to be utopian to cut working hours – we have done this before.”

As previously reported in *Healthmanagement.org*, research published in *BMJ* also shows that 12+ hour shifts are associated with burnout, job dissatisfaction and intention to leave among hospital nurses. 27 percent of the study respondents reported that they suffered from high emotional exhaustion. 10 percent reported that they experienced high depersonalisation while 17 percent indicated a feeling of low personal accomplishment. Approximately one in four of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their job and a similar proportion indicated dissatisfaction with their work schedule flexibility. A third of the respondents revealed that they planned to quit their job.

The experiment in Sweden is expected to continue until the end of 2016 and its success is motivating more and more workers and managers to change the way they live and design schedules that are able to create a more efficient balance between work and life.

Source: [The Guardian](#)

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Published on : Tue, 22 Sep 2015