Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

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FIGHT COVID-19 WITH BETTER SLEEP HEALTH: A GUIDE FOR HOSPITAL WORKERS

In the face of a global pandemic, the health and safety of hospital workers is critical to our ability to mitigate the impact of a new coronavirus, COVID-19.

Hospital workers often get less than the recommended 7–9 hours of sleep per night and may need to work around-the-clock hours. Increased demand on healthcare systems will alter schedules further.

Sleep and circadian disruption can have negative health and safety consequences including impaired immune function and increased accidents and errors.

Sleep is a tool that you can utilize to help your body fight off infection, maintain health and perform at its best, which will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of your patients.

As a hospital worker, you can take steps to ensure healthy sleep from the moment you wake up by following the guidelines below:

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Make Sleep a Priority

- **Upon waking, get at least 15–60 minutes of bright light.** Natural sunlight is best, or any bright or blue-enriched light source (e.g., light box, bright indoor lights). This signals to your biological clock that it's time to start the day.

- **Exercising closer to wake-time can signal daytime and improve sleep quality**. Avoid intense exercise close to bedtime and when you are sick.

- **Take naps and consider "banking" your sleep**. Even short naps (<20 minutes) can improve alertness, performance, and memory. Longer naps (>60 minutes) or extending sleep can make up for lost sleep or prepare you for anticipated sleep loss with a difficult shift.

- **Use caffeine judiciously**. It can help keep you awake when tired, but those effects remain for hours and can interfere with your ability to fall sleep. Therefore, try not to consume caffeine within ~6 hours of your desired bedtime. Also, caffeine may become less effective when consumed too often, which means it won't be as useful at times when you really need it.

- **Limit alcohol before bed**. It may be sedating at first, but it disrupts your sleep quality.

- **Keep a regular sleep and wake-time schedule** as much as possible, even on your days off. This helps keep your sleep and circadian systems in sync and minimizes a physiological "jet-lag."

- **Create a regular bedtime routine** of quiet activities, like taking a warm shower, reading, brushing your teeth and ending with relaxation exercises, to get your mind and body ready for sleep.

- **Limit alerting activities close to bedtime**, especially light (e.g., screens), caffeine, exercise & work.

- **Optimize your sleep environment**. Keep it DARK, cool, quiet & comfortable. Use eye masks or dark-out curtains, and turn your screens off to foster a biological night.

Source: Information provided by the Chronobiology, Light and Sleep Lab within the Department of Psychiatry at Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

Please take care of your patients by taking care of yourself.