

Sleep Specialists Needed in Industry

Kathy Sexton-Radek*

Elmhurst College, USA

*Corresponding author: Kathy Sexton-Radek, Elmhurst College, 190 Prospect Avenue, Elmhurst, IL 60126, USA, Tel: 630-617-3587; E-mail: kathysr@elmhurst.edu

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Editorial

Industry publications highlight the concept of sleeplessness in the work world [1]. Given that a full time worker commuting to work on the average of one hour each way is expending 10 hours or 42% of their day to work, the remaining 48% of their day for sleep, meals, leisure activity, work preparation/education and responsibilities is intensely juggled [1]. For many adult workers, sleep averages to be six hours or less per night because of the reduced time interval for all non-work activities. With these estimations, it is evident that sleep is a precarious part of many lives despite the dominant, time consuming work factor at 42% of the day.

A translation to general terms of the recent medical findings about the benefits of a good night sleep appears as the following: “happier, more productive, safer driver, fewer employee errors, better decision maker” [2]. The essential benefits of good sleep are rendered into worker terms in the business industry publications, with the same implicit message greater health for the individual. A further examination into such types of publications leads the business reader to applied topics such as managing jet lag and in a few of the publications, the costs of poor sleep to the industry.

Messages in publications direct the business reader to the sleep medicine findings of increased risk for development of depression, obesity and Diabetes Mellitus type II associated with Chronic Insomnia. Poor sleep as defined by reduced sleep interval and/or fragmented sleep interval with wake ups is collectively described in these articles. Work related behaviors of managing a demanding schedule, longer work hours; increased use of handheld electronic use has been associated with poor sleep [2]. Research in this area have identified the degree to which risky decisions are made, amount of sleep time, decline in task performance requiring attention and concentration, vision errors and complaints of pain have been reported. A highlighted relationship between levels of performance when sleep deprived as being the same as with alcohol impairment [3]. The ability for the worker to obtain sufficient sleep is a function of the daily rhythms being disrupted by changing nature of work and the always-on technology. Sleep health, within the industry context hasn't yet become a “top of mind” issue [2]. The business world has the capacity to positively influence a movement to sleep health amongst workers. First, the sleep health focus would engender less industry errors of personal injury and subpar performance related to the sleep deprivation and resultant errors that cost company profits. Second, the infrastructure of industry provides efficient, effective messaging to workers through staff training, “power nap” times and messaging to workers of the importance of obtaining their best sleep. The

involvement of the worker in such communications campaigns in industry for good sleep would provide a positive social influence to the worker [1,2].

Foremost in this discourse is the fact that non-pharmacological interventions such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy are effective in treating poor sleep [4]. Additionally, safe short/intermediate/long term hypnotic pharmacological agents exist to further meet the need of regulating sleep as well.

Workplace insomnia programs have recently been implemented on an experimental basis with the treatment outcome literature strongly indicating support of the interventions. In these trials, work performance was assessed as well as sleep quality using standardized measures the decreases in absenteeism and increase in presenteeism were found as well as dollar savings [1,3,4]. Clearly additional evaluation of these interventions is needed given the promising first set of findings.

Expert knowledge of the sleep specialist is needed to continue the evaluation and implementation of these interventions. This development of good sleep for workers as developed within industry could be joined by more outreach of the medical community. The expertise and scientific findings about good sleep/sleep medicine is within the sleep community, thus, an expansion to industry via hosting programming for departments and companies, providing sleep medicine treatment at the work site may represent a beginning to bridging this gap. And finally, continued attention by sleep experts is needed to the fitness tech community to help develop and monitor valid instruments of these tech advances (e.g. apps, Hightech beds, Hightech bedding, automatic blackout shades, sleep pillows and wearable trackers). Continued and expanded attention to interventions for workers' sleep quality by Sleep specialists is needed for worker modifications of their lifestyle to achieve sleep health and work efficiency.

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