Title: The Relationship Between Sleep Quality and Perceived Job Performance in Nurses Seeking Graduate Degrees

Authors and Institutions:
Emily Murphy, Undergraduate Student. The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing
Pat Carter, PhD, RN, CNS. The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing

Introduction: The dire consequences of sleep deprivation coupled with a nursing career can lead to numerous occupational hazards and possibly put patients, as well as nurses at risk. Registered nurses who are concurrently seeking a graduate degree may be at a higher risk of sleep deprivation due to their dual commitment of school and work. This study describes the relationships between sleep quality and perceptions of job performance in registered nurses who are seeking a graduate degree.

Methods: This descriptive mixed methods study investigated sleep habits and perceived job performance of nurses seeking graduate degrees. Nurses enrolled in a graduate program at The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing (UT SON) were invited to participate. An online survey was used to describe sleep and work patterns. Additionally, 48% of persons who completed the online survey participated in a qualitative interview to further explore their personal sleep quality and their personal job performance prior to and during graduate school.

Results: 33 nurses completed the online survey and 16 participated in a follow-up interview. Respondents of the survey reported moderate to severe sleep disturbances and impairment with an average sleep onset latency (SOL) of 26.6 minutes, an average sleep duration of 6.7 hours, and an average fragmentation of 2 times per night. Five major themes emerged from the interviews: competing demands, anxiety leading to increased SOL, mood disturbances, negative outcomes, and stimulant reliance at work.

Conclusion: Nurses seeking graduate degrees report moderate to severe sleep disturbances that are linked to mood disturbances, negative outcomes, and stimulant reliance at work. However, most surveyed nurses reported having an improvement or no change in job performance since beginning graduate school. This mismatch between perceived impact of poor sleep on ‘others’ and on ‘self’ is interesting. In addition, most nurses reported having no change in quality of sleep, despite getting fewer hours of sleep each night. Improving the sleeping habits of graduate nursing students should be a priority in the healthcare community. Nurses are often encouraged to pursue further education, yet little effort is made to ensure that they receive restorative sleep.