

Reducing Consecutive Shifts to Minimize Fatigue, Errors, and Injuries

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

This policy is intended to improve quality care through increased patient, resident and staff safety by reducing levels of staff fatigue associated with working too many consecutive hours or shifts, including overtime. This policy outlines organizational and individual responsibilities for reducing staff fatigue.

1.2. Scope

This policy applies to all Providence Health Care (PHC) [Staff](#) and staff scheduled by PHC (including excluded/management staff and unionized employees, both regular and casual), but does not apply to physicians, residents, students and volunteers.

1.3. Exceptions

During disasters, emergencies or other exceptional circumstances, this policy may be waived with the approval of the Leader or Manager, or Leader on Call.

2. Policy

PHC will enforce the following practices to limit the impact of staff fatigue on both staff and patient or resident safety:

- Staff shall not work more than 5 consecutive extended shifts where the shift length is greater than 8 hours without a day off. Typically the extended shifts are 12 hours in duration.
- Staff shall not work more than 7 consecutive shifts where the shift length is between 7.2 hours and 7.5 hours without a day off. This includes double shifts that do not exceed 16 hours.
- Staff will not work more than 16 hours in a 24 hour period.
- Hours worked anywhere within PHC are included in the calculation of work hours.
- Shift rotations will be forward rotation (days, evenings, nights); minimizing the number of changes between shifts to allow for adaptation of circadian rhythm; and to provide for adequate rest and recuperation between shifts.

Shift exchanges/swaps are also governed by this policy and should not be approved if they result in a schedule that would exceed the limits listed above.

Leaders and Human Resources will establish, in collaboration with staff and union representatives, the following:

- Shift schedules that meet the policy and Collective Agreement requirements; and
- Opportunities to discuss with their staff, shift schedules that decrease the impact of fatigue.

Patient Care and Staffing Office managers will establish processes to prevent staff being scheduled to work shifts or hours that would exceed the maximum consecutive shift limits described in this policy. This includes Patient Care Managers checking staff schedules before approving shift swap requests

3. Responsibilities

3.1. Leaders

- Facilitate staff work schedules and processes that maintain safe staffing levels for quality care in accordance with this policy;
- Recognize the rights and obligations of staff to decline an assignment if impaired by fatigue;
- Promote work schedules that provide for adequate rest and recuperation between scheduled shifts;
- Collaborate with their staff to establish shift duration and shift rotations that meet the Collective Agreement provisions; and
- Deny requests for shift exchanges that would exceed the maximum consecutive shift limits described in this policy.

3.2. Staff

- Arrive at work adequately rested and prepared for duty;
- Recognize personal limits and declining requests to do overtime if fatigued;
- Plan mitigation strategies to prevent fatigue including a personal commitment to work-life balance, healthy nutrition and regular exercise; and
- Review their work schedule and not submit requests for shift exchanges that would result in their schedule exceeding the maximum consecutive shifts/hours.

4. Compliance

All staff members are responsible for adhering to this policy and monitoring their activities in accordance with the policy. Staff members may warn others if they observe a violation of this policy. Failure by staff to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment, services or privileges.

5. Supporting Documents

1.4. Guidelines/Procedures/Forms

[PHC Occupational Health and Safety](#)

6. Definitions

“Staff” means all employees (including leadership), medical staff (including physicians, midwives, dentists and nurses), residents, fellows and trainees, health care professionals, students, volunteers, contractors, researchers and other service providers engaged by PHC.

“Fatigue” means an overwhelming, debilitating and sustained sense of exhaustion that decreases one’s ability to carry out daily activities including the ability to work effectively and function at one’s usual level in family or social roles.

7. References

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