Learning Objectives

1. List factors that put you at risk for sleepiness and fatigue.
2. Describe the impact of sleep loss on residents’ personal and professional lives.
3. Recognize signs of sleepiness and fatigue in yourself and others.
4. Challenge common misconceptions among physicians about sleep and sleep loss.
5. Adapt alertness management tools and strategies for yourself and your program.

The Scope of the Problem

“... I always had a prior theory that when you look up all the old sixties research how do you brainwash someone? You sleep deprive them. That’s number, two, and three. Sleep deprive them. You feed them bad food and you repeat things over and over again. It’s like that kind of covers residency.”
Despite this, the problem of sleepiness and fatigue in residency is underestimated.

Sleepiness in residents is equivalent to that found in patients with serious sleep disorders. Mustafa and Strohl, unpublished data. Papp, 2002

Why So?

- Physicians know relatively little about sleep needs and sleep physiology.
- There is no “drug test” for sleepiness.
- Most programs do not recognize and address the problem of resident sleepiness.
- The culture of medicine says:
  - “Sleep is “optional” (and you’re a wimp if you need it)”
  - “Less sleep = more dedicated doc”

What causes sleepiness?
Myth: “It’s the really boring noon conferences that put me to sleep.”
Fact: Environmental factors (passive learning situation, room temperature, low light level, etc) may unmask but DO NOT CAUSE SLEEPINESS.

Conceptual Framework (in Residency)
- Insufficient Sleep (on call sleep loss/inadequate recovery sleep)
- Fragmented Sleep (pager, phone calls)
- EXCESSIVE DAYTIME SLEEPINESS
- Circadian Rhythm Disruption (night float, rotating shifts)
- Primary Sleep Disorders (sleep apnea, etc)

Sleep Needed vs Sleep Obtained
- Myth: “I’m one of those people who only need 5 hours of sleep, so none of this applies to me.”
- Fact: Individuals may vary somewhat in their tolerance to the effects of sleep loss, but are not able to accurately judge this themselves.
- Fact: Human beings need 8 hours of sleep to perform at an optimal level.
- Fact: Getting less than 8 hours of sleep starts to create a “sleep debt” which must be paid off.
The Circadian Clock Impacts You

- It is easier to stay up later than to try to fall asleep earlier.
- It is easier to adapt to shifts in forward (clockwise) direction (day → evening → night).
- Night owls may find it easier to adapt to night shifts.

Interaction of Circadian Rhythms and Sleep

Sleep Disorders: Are you at risk?

- Physicians can have sleep disorders too!
  -- Obstructive sleep apnea
  -- Restless legs syndrome
  -- Periodic limb movement disorder
  -- Learned or “conditioned” insomnia
  -- Medication-induced insomnia

Adaptation to Sleep Loss

Myth: “I’ve learned not to need as much sleep during my residency.”

Fact: Sleep needs are genetically determined and cannot be changed.

Fact: Human beings do not “adapt” to getting less sleep than they need.

Fact: Although performance of tasks may improve somewhat with effort, optimal performance and consistency of performance do not!
Consequences of Chronic Sleep Deprivation

Sleep is a vital and necessary function, and sleep needs (like hunger and thirst) must be met.

Across Tasks

**Emergency Medicine**: significant reductions in comprehensiveness of history & physical exam documentation in second-year residents Bertram 1988

**Family Medicine**: scores achieved on the ABFM practice in-training exam negatively correlated with pre-test sleep amounts Jacques et al 1990

- **Surgery**: 20% more errors and 14% more time required to perform simulated laparoscopy post-call (two studies) Taffinder et al 1998; Gruntchmayer et al, 2001

- **Internal Medicine**: efficiency and accuracy of ECG interpretation impaired in sleep-deprived interns Lingenfelter et al, 1994

- **Pediatrics**: time required to place an intra-arterial line increased significantly in sleep-deprived Storer et al, 1989
Impact on Professionalism

“Your own patients have become the enemy...because they are the one thing that stands between you and a few hours of sleep.”

Bottom Line:
You need to be alert to take the best possible care of your patients and yourself.
Sleep Loss and Fatigue: Safety Issues

• 58% of emergency medicine residents reported near-crashes driving.
  -- 80% post night-shift
  -- Increased with number of night shifts/month
  Steele et al 1999

• 50% greater risk of blood-borne pathogen exposure incidents (needlestick, laceration, etc) in residents between 10pm and 6am. Parks 2000

Impact on Medical Education

“We all know that you stop learning after 12 or 13 or 14 hours. You don’t learn anything except how to cut corners and how to survive.”

Impact on Medical Education

• Residents working longer hours report decreased satisfaction with learning environment and decreased motivation to learn.
  Baldwin et al 1997

• Study of surgical residents showed less operative participation associated with more frequent call.
  Sawyer et al 1999

Impact on Medical Errors

• Surveys: more than 60% of anesthesiologists report making fatigue-related errors.
  Gravenstein 1990

• Case Reviews:
  - 3% of anesthesia incidents
  - 5% “preventable incidents” fatigue-related
  - 10% drug errors
  - Post-op surgical complication rates 45%, higher if resident was post-call
  Morris 2000
  Williamson 1993
  Haynes et al 1995
Recognizing Sleepiness in Yourself and Others

• Myth: "If I can just get through the night (on call), I’m fine in the morning."
• Fact: A decline in performance starts after about 15-16 hours of continued wakefulness.
• Fact: The period of lowest alertness after being up all night is between 6am and 11am (eg, morning rounds).

Estimating Sleepiness

Myth: "I can tell how tired I am and I know when I'm not functioning up to par."
Fact: Studies show that sleepy people underestimate their level of sleepiness and overestimate their alertness.
Fact: The sleepier you are, the less accurate your perception of degree of impairment.
Fact: You can fall asleep briefly ("microsleeps") without knowing it!

Anesthesia Resident Study

• Residents did not perceive themselves to be asleep almost half of the time they had actually fallen asleep.
• Residents were wrong 76% of the time when they reported having stayed awake.

Howard et al 2002
Recognize The Warning Signs of Sleepiness

- Falling asleep in conferences or on rounds
- Feeling restless and irritable with staff, colleagues, family, and friends
- Having to check your work repeatedly
- Having difficulty focusing on the care of your patients
- Feeling like you really just don’t care

If you don’t recognize that you’re sleepy, you’re not likely to do anything about it.

Alertness Management Strategies

Myth: “I’d rather just “power through” when I’m tired; besides, even when I can nap, it just makes me feel worse.”

Fact: Some sleep is always better than no sleep.

Fact: At what time and for how long you sleep are key to getting the most out of napping.
Napping

Pros: Naps temporarily improve alertness.
Types: preventative (pre-call)
         operational (on the job)
Length:
short naps: no longer than 30
minutes to avoid the gogginess
("sleep inertia") that occurs when
you’re awakened from deep sleep
long naps: 2 hours (range 30 to 180
minutes)

Napping

Timing:
-- if possible, take advantage of circadian
“windows of opportunity” (2-5 am and 2-5 pm);
-- but if not, nap whenever you can!
Cons: sleep inertia; allow adequate recovery
time (15-30 minutes)
Bottom line: Naps take the edge off but do
not replace adequate sleep.

Healthy Sleep Habits

Get adequate (7 to 9 hours) sleep before
anticipated sleep loss.
Avoid starting out with
a sleep deficit!

Recovery from Sleep Loss

Myth: “All I need is my usual 5 to 6 hours the
night after call and I’m fine.”
Fact: Recovery from on-call sleep loss
generally takes 2 nights of extended
sleep to restore baseline alertness.
Fact: Recovery sleep generally has a higher
percentage of deep sleep, which is
needed to counteract the effects of sleep
loss.
Healthy Sleep Habits

- Go to bed and get up at about the same time every day.
- Develop a pre-sleep routine.
- Use relaxation to help you fall asleep.
- Protect your sleep time; enlist your family and friends!

Healthy Sleep Habits

- Sleeping environment:
  - Cooler temperature
  - Dark (eye shades, room darkening shades)
  - Quiet (unplug phone, turn off pager, use ear plugs, white noise machine)
- Avoid going to bed hungry, but no heavy meals within 3 hours of sleep.
- Get regular exercise but avoid heavy exercise within 3 hours of sleep.

Recognize Signs of DWD *

- Trouble focusing on the road
- Difficulty keeping your eyes open
- Nodding
- Yawning repeatedly
- Drifting from your lane, missing signs or exits
- Not remembering driving the last few miles
- Closing your eyes at stoplights

* Driving While Drowsy
**Risk Factors for Drowsy Driving**

- Taking any sedating medications
- Drinking even small amounts of alcohol
- Having a sleep disorder (sleep apnea)
- Driving long distances without breaks
- Driving alone or on a boring road

**Drive Smart; Drive Safe**

- AVOID driving if drowsy.
- If you are really sleepy, get a ride home, take a taxi, or use public transportation.
- Take a 20 minute nap and/or drink a cup of coffee before going home post-call.
- Stop driving if you notice the warning signs of sleepiness.
- Pull off the road at a safe place, take a short nap.

**Drowsy Driving: What Does Not Work**

- Turning up the radio
- Opening the car window
- Chewing gum
- Blowing cold air (water) on your face
- Slapping (pinching) yourself hard
- Promising yourself a reward for staying awake

**It takes only a 4 second lapse in attention to have a drowsy driving crash.**
Drugs

- **Melatonin**: little data in residents
- **Hypnotics**: may be helpful in specific situations (e.g., persistent insomnia)
- **AVOID**: using stimulants (methylphenidate, dextroamphetamine, modafinil) to stay awake
- **AVOID**: using alcohol to help you fall asleep; it induces sleep onset but disrupts sleep later on

Caffeine

- **Strategic consumption is key**
- Effects within 15 – 30 minutes; half-life 3 to 7 hours
- Use for temporary relief of sleepiness
- **Cons:**
  - disrupts subsequent sleep (more arousals)
  - tolerance may develop
  - diuretic effects

Adapting To Night Shifts

- **Myth**: “I get used to night shifts right away; no problem.”
- **Fact**: It takes at least a week for circadian rhythms and sleep patterns to adjust.
- **Fact**: Adjustment often includes physical and mental symptoms (think jet lag).
- **Fact**: Direction of shift rotation affects adaptation (forward/clockwise easier to adapt).

How To Survive Night Float

- Protect your sleep.
- Nap before work.
- Consider “splitting” sleep into two 4 hour periods.
- Have as much exposure to bright light as possible when you need to be alert.
- Avoid light exposure in the morning after night shift (be cool and wear dark glasses driving home from work).
“The best laid plans…”

**Study:** Impact of night float coverage (2am to 6am)

**Results:** “protected” interns slept less than controls; used time to catch up on work, not sleep; thus there was no improvement in performance

Richardson et al 1996

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**Alertness Strategies**

- There is no “magic bullet.”
- Know your own vulnerability to sleep loss.
- Learn what works for you from a range of strategies.
- There needs to be a shared responsibility for fatigue management and a “culture of support” in the training program.

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**In Summary…**

- Fatigue is an impairment like alcohol or drugs.
- Drowsiness, sleepiness, and fatigue cannot be eliminated in residency, but can be managed.
- Recognition of sleepiness and fatigue and use of alertness management strategies are simple ways to help combat sleepiness in residency.
- When sleepiness interferes with your performance or health, talk to your supervisors and program director.

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For More Information Contact:
Your local Sleep Education Advocate or visit
www.aasmnet.org/MEDSleepprogram.htm
“Patients have a right to expect a healthy, alert, responsible, and responsive physician.”

January 1994 statement by American College of Surgeons
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