

Risk Factors for Workplace Fatigue- Resource Limitation

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One of the contributors to workplace fatigue is resource limitation. Lindsay, Hanson, Taylor and McBurney (2008) include large caseloads and low staff numbers as workplace stressors for physiotherapists. Limited resources for occupational therapists could also include limited finances (for programming, supplies, etc), lack of managerial support, lack of mentorship, lack of peer support and limited time. A lack of resources can lead to workplace stress, taking a toll on the mental and physical well-being of occupational therapists. The amount of resources available in a work setting varies greatly dependent on the site, however all workplaces experience limitations in one way or another. This is an issue not only for occupational therapists, but for clients as well. With inadequate resources come inadequate services. This is a stressful scenario for both parties. Low satisfaction of clients may also lead to workplace fatigue.

Resource limitation was identified repeatedly by occupational therapists in the workplace fatigue focus groups held in Calgary and Edmonton in 2014. Issues aligned to actual and perceived limitations included:

- inability to prioritize demand because many were equally urgent,
- a feeling of less control over the quality of work,
- inability to search for the most current evidence and guideline to support best practice
- feeling overwhelmed as the demand seemed never ending
- seldom achieving a sense of job satisfaction
- feeling students were a burden as opposed to an opportunity
- feelings of guilt and anxiety over providing only basic, sub-optimal intervention

In the accompanying video clip the example of resource limitation experienced by a school-based occupational therapist with a very large caseload is explored. While there is a great need for his/her services, it is not possible due to budget constraints, time allotted, and the lack of occupational therapy assistants to help each child in need. This is very clear to the therapist each day, and weighs heavily on her mind, taking an emotional toll. With such high job demands, it seems impossible to get ahead and feel that services provided are making an actual difference. Such a chronically stressful situation with poor job satisfaction is a known contributor to workplace fatigue.

Solutions to resource limitation issues are not simple. While individuals can be creative and flexible for a period of time, long term unrelenting demand with insufficient resources requires action at all levels of the system. Therapists are not responsible for continually stretching to cover and, indeed, this approach actually increases the risk of negative outcomes for therapist and patient. Therapists can, and should, develop coping mechanisms (such as leisure activity and restorative sleep) to deal with the routine stressors of their jobs and to maintain a healthy work life balance. However, for the stress of ongoing under-resourced positions administration, collective bargaining units, and governance organizations need to be involved. The Canadian Union of Public Employees document "Enough Workplace Stress: Organizing for Change (www.cupe998.mb.ca/.../WS&H/stress_guideline.pdf) is helpful to understand how to all levels have roles and responsibilities in addressing issues that contribute to workplace fatigue. A copy can be downloaded from the resource section of this website.

References

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