

Presentation 1 - What Is Workplace Fatigue?

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Workplace fatigue is a serious issue that affects many healthcare professionals.

Fatigue is a subjective feeling of tiredness affecting both physical and mental components of the body.

The cognitive signs of fatigue include: negative mood, reduced communication, poor memory, reduced attention, impaired problem solving and increased risk taking.

Many factors contribute to fatigue including those of a physiological, psychological, behavioral, and environmental nature. In the healthcare profession, the **term compassion fatigue** is often used interchangeably with workplace fatigue. This type of fatigue encompasses both burnout and secondary traumatic stress, resulting from exposure to stressful stories or events from clients. **Burnout** is characterized by emotional exhaustion, feelings of dissatisfaction, depersonalization and psychological distress. Burnout is strongly associated with large caseload size, institutional stress and the difficulty with managing a work/life balance.

Some research suggests that occupational therapists are among the top most stressed healthcare provider positions (Gupta et al 2012). Key factors associated with higher self-reported workplace fatigue among occupational therapists include demands on time and lack of autonomy.

Important **coping mechanisms** include setting boundaries and balancing home/work life, setting goals and priorities, and focusing on physical self-care and reflection. Workplace fatigue affects multiple stakeholders-employees, patients, co-workers and the organization at large. Workplace fatigue is a **shared responsibility** between employee and employer and collaborative fatigue risk management programs are important. To comply with **regulatory criteria** occupational therapists have a duty and responsibility to manage their own fatigue, participate in fatigue management for the good of the organization, and report to management any concerns about a colleague's competency for practice that may be hindered by fatigue related issues.

The accompanying audio-visual presentation provides more detail on the definition and features of workplace fatigue in the occupational therapy workplace.

Reference List of Key Readings:

- Lloyd & King. (2004). A survey of burnout among Australian mental health occupational therapists and social workers. *Soc Psychiatry*, 39, 752-757.
- Gupta, Paterson, Lysaght & Zweck. (2012). Experiences of Burnout and Coping Strategies Utilized by Occupational Therapists. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 79(2), 86-94.
- Schell. (2014). Workplace Fatigue: Background for the SAOT Increasing Health and Safety Knowledge Base in Regulated Health Professionals project (AHS). *University of Alberta, Department of Occupational Therapy*, 22-25. (a version of this report can be downloaded from this website).
- Sprang, Clark & Whitt-Woosley. (2007). Compassion Fatigue, Compassion Satisfaction, and Burnout: Factors Impacting a Professional's Quality of Life. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 12, 259-280.