

# Risk Factors for Workplace Fatigue- Uncertainty

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### **Risk Factors for Workplace Fatigue: Uncertainty**

Uncertainty is not being able to rely on something or that is not known or definite (1). Uncertainty in the workplace can cause stress and worry which leads to feelings of fatigue (2). There is evidence that links fatigue to poor physical and mental health outcomes as well as reduced sleep quality and safety outcomes(3). Therefore it is important to identify what causes fatigue in the workplace to protect both the health care worker and client (3).

There are 3 main sources of uncertainty for occupational therapists in the workplace. They include:

1. Changes in health care organization at the local, provincial and national level
2. Actual and perceived resource limitation
3. Outcome of changes on employment

#### **Changes in organizational structure, mandate and resources**

Occupational therapists rely on many resources to supply their clients with quality care. Studies show stress increases as fewer resources being available to provide this care. However, stress and worry can also be present with a perceived loss of resources (2). Both actual and perceived resource limitations lead to fatigue.

#### **Actual and perceived resource limitations**

Changes in organizational structure and reporting mechanisms are other sources of uncertainty for occupational therapists. Changes that effect work content and work context are introduced more regularly and with a greater scale (4). An environment of uncertainty is created by these changes (4). Occupational therapists feel uncertain about the types of changes and when they will happen. This causes worry among therapists as they do not know what the future holds. They perceive having a lessened sense of control over their work and continued employment. Occupational therapists in a focus group on workplace stress stated others uncertainty about what constituted occupational therapy's full scope of practice created a great deal of stress and was fatiguing to deal with on an ongoing basis.

#### **Outcome of changes on employment**

Another source of uncertainty is related to employment security. Occupational therapists feel a loss control and increased stress when they are uncertain about how their jobs will change, or if they would even have positions after organizational changes. Employment security has been studied as a stressor that leads to poor physical and mental health outcomes including symptoms of fatigue such as tiredness and sleeplessness (5). The physical health outcomes affect both those who feel their job is secure, and will be left behind, and those who fear for their employment status (5).

#### **Case Study**

Many therapists will recognize that they have experienced these uncertainties but may not have been aware of how they have contributed to their fatigue. The short case study in the accompanying video outlines how uncertainty in many areas can contribute to

fatigue. For example, a therapist who is managing an already large caseload in a psychiatric unit of a hospital uses a wide variety of screens and assessments with their clients. He becomes concerned about the availability of these resources because of budget cuts to their department. The therapist may also be stressed about the changes that are about to be reported from the provincial government and how they will affect their hospital and/or unit. Finally, the occupational therapist may also feel unsure about how his role will alter after these changes, wondering if he will even have a position. You can see that the several levels of uncertainty in the workplace cause stress and worry in an already busy individual which can have effect physical and mental health and lead to fatigue.

### **Additional Resources**

A. Feelings of fatigue due to uncertainty should not be ignored. There are several resources available:

1. This resource will help you identify if you are feeling fatigued and gives links to additional information:  
<http://work.alberta.ca/ohs-quiz/index.html> - under psychological - 5. Fatigue, extended work hours and safety in the workplace
2. This resource gives ideas on how to fight fatigue:  
[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Fatigue\\_fighting\\_tips](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Fatigue_fighting_tips)

B. Resources to help explain the evidence-based role of occupational therapy:

1. OTSeeker (evidence-based reviews of interventions) - <http://www.otseeker.com/>
2. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Position statements - <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=4>
3. American Occupational Therapy Association Position Statements <http://www.ota.org/practice/manage/official.aspx> (many are member protected so you need to ask a librarian for assistance)
4. British College of Occupational Therapists <http://www.cot.co.uk/position-statements/position-statements>

### **References**

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