



anf policy

australian nursing federation

fatigue prevention¹

The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) recognises that many nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing (however titled)² in health and other industries experience fatigue, affecting their health and safety.

The ANF objective is to support prevention of work-related fatigue amongst nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing.

WorkCover NSW and WorkSafe Victoria define fatigue as:

'an acute and/or ongoing state of tiredness that leads to mental or physical exhaustion and prevents people from functioning within normal boundaries'.³

It is the policy of the Australian Nursing Federation that:

1. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a right to a safe and healthy work place environment and to perform their work without health risks from fatigue.
2. Work-related fatigue factors to be addressed include:
 - Roster patterns
 - Length of shifts
 - Workload staffing levels, and skills mix
 - Work scheduling and planning
 - Length of time worked
 - Rest breaks
 - Timing of shifts
 - Recovery time between shifts
 - Long periods of time awake
 - Mentally or physically demanding work
 - Environmental conditions
 - Work-related travel
 - Lack of management and staff awareness of assessment and control of fatigue
 - On-call requirements.

3. Factors outside of work time include:
 - Poor quality of sleep
 - Sleep loss
 - Social life
 - Family needs
 - Other employment
 - Travel time.
4. The factors outlined in 2 and 3 above may be inter-related.
5. The ANF will assist to prevent fatigue through the Federation's occupational health and safety (OHS) and industrial activities, including through provisions in Agreements on work hours, breaks, overtime, on-call, staffing levels and workload.
6. The ANF supports a risk management approach to fatigue which involves:
 - a) Identifying if fatigue is a hazard caused by:
 - Mental and physical demands of work, such as concentration for extended periods of time, excessive workload, inappropriate skills mix
 - Work scheduling and planning, such as inadequate time to recover from work
 - Working time, such as working at a time when workers are biologically programmed to sleep
 - Environmental conditions, such as working in uncomfortable environmental conditions
 - Interaction with other hazards, such as the cumulative effects of muscle fatigue, strains and sprains
 - Work-related travel
 - Factors outside of work, such as caring responsibilities
 - Workplace bullying.
 - b) Assessing fatigue risks (that is, deciding which hazards need to be addressed) in consultation with Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs).
 - c) Controlling fatigue risks through risk control measures which focus on the factors that cause fatigue at source or, if that is not reasonably practicable, use measures that reduce the risk.

Risk control measures should address risks associated with:

- Work scheduling and planning, such as ensuring adequate nursing and midwifery staffing

- Working time, such as allowing for recovery time between shifts
- Mental and physical demands of work, such as eliminating excessive mental and physical demands
- Environmental conditions, such as ensuring that the workplace and surroundings are well lit, safe and secure
- Ongoing training in fatigue assessment and control strategies
- Factors outside of work, such as providing training and information on avoiding fatigue.

7. The ANF recognises that prevention of fatigue should involve consultation between employers and HSRs.

Consultation must occur when:

- identifying where fatigue is a workplace hazard
- deciding how fatigue is to be controlled
- changes are proposed to work schedules and working procedures
- developing each step of the risk management approach, and
- an incident occurs.

8. The ANF expects that employers of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing meet their obligations under OHS legislation to, so far as is reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health from fatigue, by providing the following:

- a) Systems of work that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health from fatigue
- b) Information, instruction, training or supervision to enable nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to perform their work in a way that is safe and without risks to health from fatigue
- c) A safe and comfortable work environment, for example, thermal conditions.

9. The ANF expects that employers will prevent fatigue through:

- a) Development and implementation of a management policy to prevent fatigue
- b) Implementation of risk management to identify, assess and control fatigue hazards and risks
- c) Integration of fatigue prevention into all aspects of the workplace and systems, including OHS representation, consultation and issue resolution
- d) Communication to raise understanding and involvement in fatigue prevention

- e) Action plans which outline management responsibilities, timelines and resources allocation for fatigue prevention at workplace and organisation levels
 - f) Provision of knowledge and skills in fatigue prevention for managers and supervisors
 - g) Provision of flexibility within working arrangements to ensure the retention of the ageing workforce, as well as to provide for the return to work of lactating mothers.
10. The ANF supports involvement of HSRs in prevention of fatigue through:
- a) Representation of workers with employers
 - b) Health and Safety Committee (HSC) formulation, review and dissemination of plans for prevention of fatigue
 - c) OHS issue resolution
 - d) Issue of a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) or a request for Inspectors to attend the workplaces if the employers have not acted to resolve fatigue issues after consultation with HSRs.
11. The ANF will encourage OHS Regulator action on the prevention of fatigue through:
- a) Development and promotion of guidance across health and aged care
 - b) Providing skills and guidance in fatigue prevention for Inspectors
 - c) Inspector visits to targeted workplaces
 - d) Reviews of the impact of shift work on cancer and cardio vascular disease
 - e) Inclusion of prevention of fatigue in Business Plans for health and aged care
 - f) Development and implementation of codes and guidance on fatigue prevention under the National OHS system
 - g) Enforcement of OHS legislation, including strategic prosecutions.
12. The ANF will endeavour to address the causes of fatigue where possible in Industrial Agreements.
13. The ANF will encourage workplace delegates to work with HSRs on the prevention of fatigue.
14. The ANF supports involvement of members in the prevention of fatigue through:
- a) Reporting fatigue issues to HSRs and management, and
 - b) Consultation through HSRs on fatigue control measures.
15. The ANF will include fatigue prevention in Federation information, education and training for HSRs, workplace delegates and other members.

16. The ANF commits to:
- a) Supporting the prevention of fatigue amongst nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing.
 - b) Increasing the capability of the Federation- especially of Organisers, OHS Officers, Health and Safety Representatives and workplace delegates - to assist with prevention of fatigue.

endorsed november 2010

references

1. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following ANF Policies relating to OHS and working hours:
 - Occupational Health and Safety Policy (May 2009)
 - Rostering (May 2009)

Reference should also be made to the OHS Acts and Regulations.

The following Guidance is also relevant:

- Fatigue prevention in the workplace, WorkCover NSW and WorkSafe Victoria, August 2008, www.workcover.nsw.gov.au, www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
 - Health and Safety Guidelines for Shift Work and Extended Working Hours, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), 2000
2. This is a generic term to describe such classifications as assistants in nursing, personal care assistants and personal care workers.
 3. WorkCover NSW and WorkSafe Vic, Fatigue Prevention in the Workplace, 2008, page 3.