MAKING SENSE OF FATIGUE: Implications of Social Constructs of Fatigue In Clinical Training & Practice

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

☐ I have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this presentation
“...duty hours alone may not be effective in addressing sleep deprivation in house staff.”

"European residents still experience disrupted sleep patterns, feel fatigued and fall asleep at work."

"...sleep deprived residents appear to lose the capacity to recognize their own possible impairment.”

"We have transformed the trainees from dedicated professionals into shift workers.”

Fatigue Management Strategies
Fatigue Management Strategies

- Optimize sleep/rest
- Identify fatigue-susceptible tasks
- Mitigate risk at systems-level

Fatigue as an “identifiable Occupational Health & Safety Hazard”

(Dawson & McCulloch 2005)

Does this translate into the residency context?
Explore how the social learning environment shapes residents understanding of fatigue
Methods

- Constructivist Grounded Theory
- 21 interviews
- Radiology, psychiatry, critical care, pediatrics, general surgery, orthopedic surgery, internal medicine
- Routinely scheduled 24h call shifts
- Field notes, transcripts, memos
- REB approval (HSREB# 102769)
Principles of Fatigue

- Manageable through experience
- Surmountable when required
- Inescapable and therefore acceptable
- Necessary for future practice
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Fatigue is manageable through experience.

You just can’t stand up anymore. You can’t keep your eyes open anymore. You feel like you are going to pass out or whatever. A lot of people have those sensations after staying up for 24 hours. We learn to manage that. (017)

“I find that you get so trained to working fatigued that it is just not something that you would say that is the reason I made the error. I think you would blame it on something else.” (014)
“You know, being tired might be a valid excuse to put things off that can wait, but it’s not an acceptable excuse for poor decision making. At least not in the medical culture, I think.” (006)

Fatigue is surmountable when required

“I think as long as you can stand up and stay awake and physically manage, then you can usually force your brain to work, even if it is harder to do and you may be more prone to mistakes” (017)

“You lie down and all of a sudden you get paged with something that’s really acute and the patient is really sick... you definitely feel the adrenaline. It’s funny, you’ll be so tired and then all of a sudden you’ll be so awake you forget you ever even needed to sleep” (013)
Fatigue Management Strategies

Fatigue as an individual challenge

VS

Fatigue as a collective threat

(Dawson & McCulloch 2005)
Implications: Study Design

- Single-institution
- Not intended to be generalizable
- Insider perspective + reflexivity
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“If sleep does not serve an absolutely vital process, it is the biggest mistake the evolutionary process has ever made”
– Allan Rechtschaffen

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