



**Sleepiness and fatigue in health workers can adversely impact the safety and quality of patient care.**

Fatigue can be a major hazard for patient safety, and for individuals working long and/or irregular hours. In Australia, many industries are now working to reduce the fatigue-related risks associated with their work schedules and work environments. Industries such as mining, aviation, rail and road transport, emergency service and maritime are being proactive in increasing understanding of fatigue-related risk and implementing steps to mitigate or prevent it.

The current project aims to develop practical tools and strategies to assist healthcare workers to recognise, prevent and mitigate fatigue. We would like you to be involved.

Previous work by the Council and other groups in Australia has shown that long hours are relatively common in healthcare, particularly when compared to other industries. Research also shows that many healthcare professionals report feeling fatigue and that fatigue does affect their work. The obvious answer might be to reduce work hours. However, limits on work hours may not be the best way to manage fatigue; the most important factor is how much sleep people get. Of course, hours of work do play a large role in how much sleep people get, but they are not the only factor. The tools and strategies that we develop will be aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of sleep and reducing the risk of fatigue-related errors in the workplace to improve patient safety. This might include specific training programs, procedures to 'fatigue-proof' a task, or managing workload differently during the day and night.

The tools and strategies will be developed using a number of consultative steps so we can draw on a broad cross-section of the health care community. National consultation will include:

- Targeted focus groups and interviews across the country,
- Review by Key Advisory Panel and Steering Committee,
- Open forum on webpage,
- Trial of tools and strategies on-site,
- Review by key stakeholders including colleges, unions and consumer groups.

The initial consultation phase began in March 2005 and is addressing the following major themes:

- Perceptions about the causes of fatigue.
- Frequency, typology and consequences of errors and incidents.
- Types of errors that others make.
- Identifying successful informal practices.
- Training and education.
- Culture and implementation issues.
- Fatigue management system framework.

The draft tools and strategies will be developed using input from the initial consultation phase and will be available for review in June 2005.

For more information or to register your interest in being involved in the project please contact: Sally or Jill – (08) 82226624 or email at [sally.ferguson@unisa.edu.au](mailto:sally.ferguson@unisa.edu.au), [jill.dorrian@unisa.edu.au](mailto:jill.dorrian@unisa.edu.au)