

Workforce (Wednesday 4 July, 15.30 – 16.45)

Are long nursing shifts on hospital wards associated with sickness absence? A longitudinal retrospective observational study

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Background

Working shifts of 12 hours or more has been associated with negative impacts on nurses' wellbeing and performance; however, previous studies used subjective measures and cross-sectional techniques, failing to capture the complexity that encompasses the relationship between shift patterns and related outcomes.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate whether working shifts of 12 hours or more is associated with increased sickness absence among registered nurses and healthcare assistants working in acute hospital wards.

Methods

A retrospective longitudinal study using routinely collected data from March 2012 to March 2015 across 32 general inpatient wards at a large acute hospital in England. Shifts worked by registered nurses and health care assistants and sickness absence episodes were extracted from the hospital's electronic rostering systems. Shift patterns were characterised in terms of proportion of long shifts (≥ 12 -h shifts), proportion of night shifts and proportion of days worked in the preceding seven days. We used generalised linear mixed models to explore the association between shift patterns and the subsequent occurrence of short (< 7 days) or long-term (≥ 7 days) sickness absence

Results

We analysed 601,282 shifts. There were 8090 distinct episodes of sickness absence, of which 2532 (31.3%) were classified as long-term. Staff were more likely to miss a shift due to sickness if they were scheduled to work a long shift, compared to a shift of eight hours or less (OR=1.24; 95% CI: 1.16-1.31). When more than 75% of shifts worked in the past seven days were 12 hours or more in length, the odds of both a short-term (adjusted odds ratio (aOR)= 1.28; 95% CI: 1.18-1.39) and long-term sickness episode (aOR= 1.22; 95% CI: 1.08-1.37) were increased compared to working none.

Implications

This longitudinal study showed that working long shifts on hospital ward is associated with a higher risk of sickness absence for registered nurses and healthcare assistants. The higher sickness absence rates associated with long shifts could result in additional costs or loss of productivity for hospitals.