



# California Peer Support Association Newsletter

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## Get Good Sleep ...Yeah Right

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Recently, Kathy Wellbrock, Ph.D. and I had a great opportunity to teach peer support to several federal law enforcement agencies in Washington, DC. While we were there, we had the opportunity to attend a presentation put on by the Harvard Sleep Medicine Division at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital. The presentation covered the information they gathered from their research which surveyed many different groups of people. They researched fire, police, astronauts, hospital interns / residents and graduate students. The portion they focused on was the police research results. It was fantastic. We learned a lot of information that is pertinent to peer support.

My husband was in law enforcement for 38 years. He has terrible sleeping habits. Always has. He has forever said, "part of the job". He is no different than most I know that are in the profession. Whether you are a dispatcher, records clerk, working the street or in any other division, you probably do not sleep well. If you do you are rare. It is part of the career. As peer supporters you know many people that work with you who have the same sleep problems you do.



In all of the classes we teach, we have for years touched on the importance of sleep. Sleep is the most important thing you can do for your mental and physical health. We all know it, but tend to ignore it. We even brag about how much sleep we do not need. Have you ever heard someone say, "Oh, I only need 5 hours of sleep and I am good to go"? They are kidding themselves. We all need more sleep than we ever get or that we are willing to admit we need. As a therapist, I can look at a problem someone is having and usually connect it in some way to their sleep deprivation.

Finally, there is hard evidence and research to confirm what everyone has known for years. Those that work in the law enforcement profession do not sleep enough and because of that there are risks involved. Let me explain what their research showed after studying 5,000 cops from Canada and the United States.

46% admitted to falling asleep or nodding off while they were driving in a patrol car. Think about the risks... accidents, accidents, accidents.

33.6% tested positive for Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). Think about the risks... potentially fatal, be-

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cause their airway closes and they gasp for a breath and can choke. It also increases weight gain, which can lead to obesity.

53.9% tested positive for shift-work disorder. Think about the risks... accidents, accidents, accidents, behavioral problems, anger issues, depression, use of force complaints and relationship problems, because their wake-time sleepiness and insomnia increases.

Let's look at what a peer supporter can do when someone tells them about their sleep problems. Talk to them about the healthy ways to combat sleep deprivation. Encourage them to stop the un-healthy behaviors. Here are some of the discussions you can have with someone who is having difficulties with sleep (and remember, they may not know that the problems they are having at home and at work are caused by their sleep deprivation).

First of all, there are many different recommendations that were made by the researchers. They talked openly about the abuse of sleep aids. The message was not to take them on an on-going basis. They impact your liver negatively. If you have to take a sleep aid, they recommended no more than a half of a melatonin pill from a health food store. Plan ahead. Take a warm shower before you are going to go to sleep. It will relax you. Do light stretching. Play quiet music, read a book, wear ear plugs, keep your bedroom cool and dark. When you keep the lights off, it causes your light sensitive hormone to decrease. White noise helps you sleep (fan, white noise producing radio that has waves, birds, etc. on it). Do not eat a large meal at least three hours before you are going to go to sleep and do not drink alcohol four hours before you go to sleep (I realize that is really going to be difficult for some). It is a myth that you will sleep better if you have had a few drinks. It will cause your brain to wake up in the middle of your sleep cycle and probably wake you up to go to the bathroom, which means you

will turn the light on, which then wakes up your light sensitive hormone and now you will not go back to sleep. Do not drink caffeine before you go to bed, it will keep you awake or wake you up in the middle of your sleep time.

There are more research results I will write about at a later date. This will help all of you for now. Please look at sleep as a way our bodies, minds and souls rejuvenate. If we do not get enough sleep we are hurting ourselves. We all know what shift work does to your system. We were not meant to be awake during dark hours, we are supposed to be sleeping. Well, it does not work that way in emergency service professions. Shift work is part of the career. Since there isn't anything that is going to change that, we need to find better ways to cope with sleep deprivation. I hope some of the research findings will

*Please look at sleep as a way our bodies, minds and souls rejuvenate.*

help you help others and help yourself. Let's all work together and get more sleep. If we can teach people how impor-

tant more sleep is for all of us, it will, for a fact, decrease use of force complaints, safety errors, accidents, anger outbursts, suicides, depression, stomach problems, anxiety disorders, diabetes, heart disease, family problems, negative attitudes and burnout etc.

When you are a peer supporter, openly discuss these and show the person that many of the very issues they are struggling with could be caused by lack of sleep or lack of a good solid sleep time. Now that I have finished this short article for CPSA, I think I am getting sleepy, so, I think I will go to sleep. Be safe!