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24 Hours? No Problem! Staying Awake On Your Shift

Working a 24-hour shift presents special challenges to the EMS professional. Performing complex skills at a time of night when millennia of biology are telling your body that you should be home in bed puts the EMT at unique risk for making errors. Shift work is also associated with short and long term health issues. Sometimes the only issue you are facing on the night shift is HOW DO I STAY AWAKE?! This presentation takes the audience through a 24-hour shift with two dozen mini-lectures exploring the physiology of sleep and waking, the unique qualities and hazards of night-shift EMTs and their patients, and methods to stay awake and alert when the rest of the world is sleeping.

Curtis Olson is an emergency department nurse in Lincoln, Nebraska. He has degrees in nursing (Diploma 2003/BSN 2010) and literature (1985). He has taught extensively on emergency and medical topics to nurses, medical students, EMTs, citizen responders, and children. He has also worked as a paramedic/firefighter, bookstore manager, and coffee shop barista.

After attending this session, the learner will be able to:

1. Describe specific health hazards (for health professionals & their patients) of shift work
2. Describe the biology of sleep and waking
3. Evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of different methods that can be used to stay awake during night shifts.

Outline:

0700: Good morning! Welcome to your 24 hour shift. Let's get to know each other
0800: Coffee. The history of coffee. Making great coffee. Coffee traditions in the fire service
0900: Sleep: What IS sleep?
1000: Eating to stay awake: Serotonin and Leptin
1100: Espresso & Espresso beans.
1200: Cola and other sugary caffeinated beverages
1300: Caffeine as a medication
1400: Circadian rhythms: highs & lows, fighting biology
1500: The biochemistry of sleep: Melatonin, light & darkness. Fooling the brain
1600: Energy drinks: What's in this stuff?
1700: Energy shots
1800: The night as "frontier"
1900: Shift work: Dangerous for your patients. Dangerous for your career. Dangerous for YOU!
2000: Shift work sleep disorder: Diagnosing sleepiness
2100: Medicating sleepiness
2200: Bad shifts: Fire departments: Kelly days, ABCs, FDNY
2300: Bad shifts: The Navy
0000: Bad shifts: Residents
0100: Caffeine and Alcohol
0200: Napping
0300: "The Literature" of sleep: Orwell, Fitzgerald, Thatcher, Theroux & others
0400: When good sleep goes bad: Sleep apnea, sleep paralysis
0500: Impaired & addicted healthcare providers
0600: A few last thoughts: Exercise, aromatherapy
0700: Time to sleep! Benadryl, melatonin, darkness, quiet
0800: Drive safe and sleep well! The dangers of drowsy driving.