



Sleep Apnea in the Workplace Health & Safety Initiative

www.sleepvancouver.org

Sleep Apnea Overview

The health consequences, costs, and detriment to the workplace of untreated Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) have been well documented. Successful treatment of OSA using both Continuous Positive Airway Pressure and Oral Appliances is similarly unequivocally illustrated.

According to the **Canadian Lung Association** "Sleep apnea is actually quite common. Many people who have sleep apnea haven't yet been diagnosed. We know that:

- 20% of adults have at least mild sleep apnea (1 in 5 adults); and
- almost 7% of adults have at least moderate sleep apnea (1 in 15 adults)."

Untreated Mild – Moderate Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) nearly doubles risk of cardiovascular disease. Untreated Severe OSA quadruples the risk of cardiovascular disease, and creates a 46% increased risk of death.

A **University of British Columbia**¹ based research study concluded:

- We have demonstrated a clear relationship between **excessive sleepiness and decreased work productivity** in a population referred for suspected sleep-disordered breathing.
- Screening for sleepiness and sleep-disordered breathing in the workplace has the potential to identify a **reversible cause of low work productivity**.
- There is a gradual increase in work limitations with severity of subjective sleepiness.
- The study showed a deleterious effect of OSA on time management and work output.
- Snorers and OSA patients showed difficulties with concentration, learning of new tasks and performing new tasks.
- Snoring patients showed far more work impairment than nonsnorers.
- There is a robust relationship between subjective sleepiness and work limitations.
- Patients may have occult depression associated with work limitations.
- **Screening for SDB in the workplace has the potential for decreased "presenteeism" and improvement of work productivity.**
- Sleep fragmentation leads to:
 - Poor quality of sleep
 - Excessive daytime sleepiness
 - Reduced vigilance
 - Microsleeps
 - Neurochemical dysfunction
- **OSA has an adverse effect on productivity**

A well recognized study involving a commercial trucking company demonstrated a 73% reduction in hospital admissions and an approximate 50% reduction in global health care spending when treatment for OSA was initiated.

¹ THE IMPACT OF OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA AND DAY TIME SLEEPINESS ON WORK LIMITATION
C.F. Ryan, J. A. Fleetham et al
Department of Medicine and Division of Respiratory Medicine, University of B.C., Vancouver, B.C. – 2007

Sleep Apnea in the Workplace, Health & Safety Initiative - Program Outline

Steps and objectives:

- To Educate - through a coordinated awareness program.
- To Identify - through screening questionnaire.
- To Diagnose - through involvement of family physicians & sleep specialists.
- To Treat – provide therapy to those patients who are diagnosed with sleep apnea.

Why participate?

1. In addition to the patient health benefits, there are sufficient positive business outcomes for industry stakeholders to justify the adoption and promotion of this program.
2. We will assist the employer in promoting the program through the circulation of patient education materials, web based information, along with group presentations. The success of this program will provide excellent public relations opportunities for employers, targeting the areas of employee health, workplace safety, and productivity.
3. Simplicity - using a short questionnaire as a first step to triage the employee population, followed by a simple at home sleep test we are able to easily and effectively identify individuals who may benefit from treatment and/or further study.
4. This active and cooperative approach to the identification and treatment of OSA within an employee population is both financially sound and ethically responsible.
5. The program protocol is based upon a sound medical platform developed in conjunction with sleep specialist Avinder Minhas MD, MBBS, FRCPC, FAASM, Dip.ABSM, and Mr. Les Matthews, RRT Associate Professor of Respiratory Therapy, Faculty of Science Sleep Program Coordinator Thompson Rivers University.

Along with the OSA sufferer, sleep partner, and their family and friends the employer has a very significant interest in the sleep health of their employees. Of the many factors affecting employee performance quality of sleep has perhaps the most far reaching, important, and varied consequences.

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