The Future of Shift Work in Healthcare

One in three healthcare shift workers are substantially impacted by their shift work, with greater risk of mental health disorders, sick leave, errors at work and risk of accidents.

Recognising that something has to be done, the Alertness CRC recently held a Shift Work in Healthcare Summit, bringing together over 70 healthcare experts to identify the current challenges, discuss the future of shift work in healthcare, and ascertain what obstacles and options lie ahead.

Professor Brendan Murphy, Chief Medical Officer for the Australian Government, delivered the Keynote Address in which he stated that “change is required” and that “there is an evidence base to show this.” Dr Tracey Sletten of Monash University presented some examples of this evidence base, with studies showing improvements to rotating shift work schedules through applying circadian principles.

A Panel of experts, including representatives from WorkSafe, the Victorian Hospitals’ Industrial Association, Alfred Health, the Association of Salaried Medical Officers Federation and Austin Health, were asked in which key outcomes they would want to see impact if provided with the evidence to drive change in shift work practices in hospitals. They were also invited to expand on this, outlining what they believe to be the main challenges to implementing these changes in hospitals.

Resistance to change, funding and other commonly known challenges were debated. But, in the end, it was recognised by the majority that these are not permanent boundaries, and that fatigue is something that needs to be controlled across the whole healthcare industry.

The trick, it seems, is determining how to drive the change forward.

The Alertness CRC has established an ‘Early Adopter Program’ to introduce new shift work management tools and help forge best practice fatigue management in healthcare. The group’s aim is to shape the policies, processes, legislation and tools surrounding shift work/fatigue management; from workplace rostering through to individualised sleep health management for shift workers. Those who join the group will canvass improvements for managing shift work/fatigue, whilst also having access to new solutions being delivered by the Alertness CRC. This includes the AlertSafe™ Rostering Tool; a research-driven product that can help to optimise work schedules for maximum performance and safety.

Since the Summit, the Alertness CRC has received numerous expressions of interest from attending delegates to join this program.

Should you be interested in knowing more, please contact inquiries@alertnesscrc.com and we will direct your email to the following people accordingly:
An impressive line-up of panellists take to the stage at the Alertness CRC Shift Work in Healthcare Summit, to discuss change in shift work practices in hospitals