



Preface
Sleep Disorders



Dana R. Epstein, PhD, RN
Guest Editor

Sleep disorders are taking their toll on Americans! The National Sleep Foundation's (NSF) 2002 "Sleep in America" poll (<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/2002poll.html>) continues to demonstrate what the previous polls (<http://www.sleepfoundation.org/publications/execsum.html>) have shown: sleep, and particularly lack of it, has a tremendous impact on health, social, and economic areas of our daily lives. Forty-seven million adults have inadequate sleep. Young adults are particularly affected by daytime sleepiness. Poor sleep habits are related to behavior, mood, and performance. The NSF poll respondents felt that inadequate sleep affects their interpersonal relationships, impairs work performance, increases vulnerability to injuries, and adversely influences their health.

What do persons with sleep difficulty do about their problem? The current and past NSF polls indicate that many Americans with sleep problems use prescription medication and self-medicate using over-the-counter sleep aids and alcohol to induce sleep. Problems with tolerance and dependency, as well as a lack of data regarding the long-term effectiveness of sleeping medication make this a questionable choice. Alcohol has known sleep disruptive properties and a limited duration of efficacy that can lead to using larger amounts. Alcohol and certain sleeping medications can worsen sleep problems such as sleep disordered breathing. In the 2002 poll, 8% of respondents with daytime sleepiness occurring at least a few days a week used medication to stay awake. Most of these individuals used over-the-counter medication.

Persons with inadequate sleep patterns and daytime sleepiness pose potential problems for society. For example, roughly one half of Americans acknowledge driving a vehicle while drowsy. Seventeen percent of adults report dozing off while driving. The National Transportation Safety Board considers fatigue to be the principal cause of serious transportation accidents in the United States.

What can nurses do about this public health problem? Complaints about difficulty sleeping need to be explored. A simple statement of “I have trouble sleeping” can be related to one or more sleep disorders. Sleep disorders do not always occur independently. They may be associated with another sleep disorder and with many health conditions such as depression, heart disease, stroke, pain, obesity, and chronic respiratory disorders. Unfortunately, patients often do not talk to health care providers about their sleep. A previous NSF poll found that the primary reasons insomniacs give for not discussing their sleep difficulty is that they do not think they have a problem and it is too trivial to mention. Yet the current NSF poll reveals insomnia is the most prevalent sleep disorder in the United States. Considering the relationship of sleep to quality of life and that we spend about one third of our lives asleep, we may be ignoring a substantial part of our patients’ health. Recognition of the state of the science through current research findings and knowledge of common sleep disorders, methods of assessment, treatment strategies, and appropriate referral sources can help nurses to address our nation’s substantial sleep problems.

This issue of *The Nursing Clinics of North America* features articles by nurse clinicians, educators, and researchers who are active participants in the effort to bring sleep awareness to the public and clinical arenas. The articles include an overview of sleep and common assessment methods, the more common sleep disorders, and sleep in special populations.

Sleep and sleep disorders are gaining recognition by the general public and healthcare providers. The NSF sponsors a major public awareness campaign each year to highlight sleep’s importance and impact on quality of life. Sleep Awareness Week is coordinated with the change to daylight savings time when Americans set their clocks forward and subsequently may lose one hour of sleep. Web sites devoted to providing information about sleep are growing. The electronic addresses for many of these sites are provided in the articles. Patients suffering from sleep disorders are taking things into their own hands. The Talk About Sleep web site (<http://www.talkaboutslepp.com>) is a good example of a site developed and maintained by motivated sleep disorders sufferers turned activists, who are dedicated to increasing awareness and understanding of sleep and sleep disorders.

Funding for sleep research is on the increase. This movement began in 1987 when the National Institutes of Health Director was mandated to create a sleep research plan. The efforts led to the development of the National Center on Sleep Disorders Research (<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/ncsdr/index.htm>) under the auspices of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood

Institute (NHLBI). The National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) (<http://www.nih.gov/ninr/>) is an active participant in program announcements for the solicitation of research proposals related to sleep. Many of the authors in this issue have current and past funding support from NINR and NHLBI. The authors' programs of research are contributing to the development of evidence-based nursing practice in sleep and sleep disorders.

The nurses and their coauthors who contributed to this issue are actively involved in teaching, research, and patient care related to sleep and I thank them for the commitment that is so well reflected in this issue. I also want to thank Liz Bennett-Bailey, Editor of *The Nursing Clinics of North America*, who recognized the significance of sleep disorders, nursing's contribution to this prevalent problem, and the importance of spreading the message about what nurses can do to address it. Hopefully, with the increased awareness of sleep and sleep disorders brought about by federal and state agencies, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and private corporations, patients will be more likely to report sleep problems complain and healthcare providers more likely to ask about sleep habits and patterns.

Dana R. Epstein, PhD, RN
Department of Veterans Affairs
Carl T. Hayden Medical Center
650 E. Indian School Rd. (ERS1151)
Phoenix, AZ 85012, USA

E-mail: dana.epstein@med.va.gov