

October 7, 2010

Dear Qing Ling:

Thank you for your interest in our research and your thoughtful response.

You are absolutely correct that considerable documentation about the effects of shift work and fatigue on shift workers, including nurses, exists. As early as 1935, Lillian M. Gilbreth published her work in the American Journal of Nursing expressing concern about the effect of fatigue on patient care, safety, and outcomes. More recently, across many professionals who are engaged in shift work while holding the safety of other human beings in their hands (specifically physicians and airplane pilots), research has shown that interventions are necessary. Indeed, both of the professions listed above are farther ahead than nursing in addressing this very important issue.

We believe that interventions do exist to help shift workers fight fatigue and improve their performance. Further, we also believe that in several countries there has been more willingness to intervene to help nurses (and other health care workers) improve their ability to perform more safely in the care they give others and the protection they provide for themselves in their off duty lives.

In the United States, continued effort to clarify the magnitude of the problem is necessary. These efforts will help overcome the barriers to make staffing changes and/or provide opportunities for fatigue countermeasures during the provision of care over work shifts that often exceed 12 hours. Some of the barriers include (a) the attitudes of hospital administrators and staff nurses that 12 hours shifts are the preferred working environment, (b) the attitudes of nurses and administrators that breaks, particularly those that might include a nap, are unacceptable work behaviors, and (c) the structures in hospitals that do not provide the appropriate environment to implement fatigue countermeasures.

These will continue to be the focus of our research.

Thank you again for your thoughtful response.

Sincerely,

Linda D. Scott, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN on behalf of the authors