

Fusion

The voice of aged care

Winter 2022 | www.lasa.asn.au



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LEADING AGE SERVICES
AUSTRALIA

The voice of aged care

NEW BEGINNINGS

Reset for aged care reform

Aged Care
Employee Day
7 August



Aged Care
Employee Day
Thanks for caring



LASA AND ACSA MEMBERS VOTE FOR UNITY

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- Co-design with the consumer voice in mind
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THE THREE FACES OF WORKPLACE FATIGUE

HOW EMPLOYERS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Fatigue is more than feeling tired and drowsy. According to Safe Work Australia, it's an acute or ongoing state of mental or physical exhaustion. There are three types of workplace fatigue, which are important to look out for, particularly given the amount of stress aged care workers have faced over the past two years. With appropriate intervention and focused action, employers can help manage workplace fatigue and minimise its impact.

Worker fatigue

Worker fatigue can reduce a care worker's ability to perform their work safely and effectively. Signs of worker fatigue include tiredness even after sleep, reduced hand-eye co-ordination, slow reflexes, short-term memory problems, increased accidents and injuries, problems concentrating, blurred or impaired vision, and needing extended sleep during days off.

Aged care workers are among the top occupations at risk of worker fatigue due to factors such as tight roster patterns, long shifts or insufficient recovery time between shifts, harsh environmental conditions (such as high risk of COVID-19 transmission), and prolonged or intense mental or physical activity.

It is important for aged care leaders to identify factors in their service that may be causing worker fatigue, by consulting with managers and workers about the impact of workloads and rosters and reviewing workplace incident and human resource data.

Compassion fatigue

Compassion fatigue is a form of depletion that erodes a person's emotional capacity to care about others. This can manifest in workers simply 'going through the motions', which is a real problem in caring professions where compassion is integral to the job.

Compassion fatigue is a symptom of work-related stress or burnout, particularly prominent during times of crisis. Recent events in Australia such as floods, bushfires and the pandemic have exacerbated burnout in aged care, increasing industry and community awareness of compassion fatigue. The warning



signs overlap with those of worker fatigue and can include intense fluctuations in mood or behaviour, loss of hope, low self-worth, and impaired judgement or cognitive ability.

Aged care leaders can help protect their staff from compassion fatigue by reviewing their work, health and safety (WHS) protocols, recognising the warning signs and ensuring that staff resilience boosters are prioritised with regular breaks, sleep, nutrition and exercise. It is also crucial that staff are given access to a range of supports, such as an employee assistance program (EAP).

Change fatigue

It is not uncommon for significant change events to occur occasionally in the workplace, such as major workforce changes, organisational restructuring, and overhauling of policies, processes or systems. Change fatigue can occur when the need for change arises at an accelerated rate, with little to no prior planning.

External influences like COVID-19 provide a prime example. The pandemic has had a dramatic impact on aged care workplace settings. Employers and employees alike have endured chronic 'pivoting', rapidly adjusting to changes over and over again, most notably to keep up with shifting rules

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around infection control. Under such circumstances, a person's resilience to change wears thin. Personnel experiencing change fatigue may exhibit signs of grief, such as shock, denial, anger, resignation or depression, in addition to the typical signs of mental stress or fatigue mentioned previously.

It is important for aged care employers to mitigate change fatigue, where possible, by following an effective change management strategy, with particular emphasis on clear, empathetic, two-way communication and consultation with staff. Again, the provision of external support resources such as an EAP is imperative.

Under work health and safety laws, aged care providers are obliged to protect their staff from workplace fatigue. While workforce shortages and work demands are difficult challenges to overcome, aged care providers can still foster a mentally healthy workplace by promoting supportive workplace relationships, where roles are clear and change is well managed. Service providers who are spread thin or need help can seek support from a professional human resources advisor.

Anna Pannuzzo is Director, WorkplacePLUS.

For more information visit www.workplaceplus.com.au

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