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Position Paper College Student Sleep

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The spring 2017 National College Health Assessment (NCHA) surveyed 63,497 undergraduate and graduate students across the nation about sleep and sleep-related practices and behaviors (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2017). Of those that were surveyed, 19.7% reported that sleep impacted their individual academic performance. When asked to answer how often they felt tired, dragged out, or tired during the day over the past week, 8.6% responded “0 days,” 30.7 percent responded “1–2 days,” 44.2% responded “3–5 days,” and 16.5% responded “6+ days.” More than half of respondents felt that sleepiness during daytime activities was “a little problem” or “more than a little problem.”

The American College Health Association has collaborated with various professionals and disciplines to develop initiatives that assist universities and colleges across the nation, from implementing programs to promoting health. Its *Healthy Campus 2020* created specific objectives to increase the health and wellness of college students. An objective for sleep was included in health impediments to academic practice; its goal was to reduce the proportion of students who reported academic performance was adversely affected by sleep difficulties in the past month.

College is often a time of change, when many individuals are on their own for the first time and the transition to adulthood begins. Institutions of higher education should consider the sleep needs of students. Prolonged sleep disturbances could have adverse health effects, which includes increased risk for multiple chronic diseases such as depression, diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disorders (Porkka-Heiskanen, Zitting, and Wigren, 2013). Students identified as at risk for sleep disorders may be more likely to leave an institution (Gualtney, 2016).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote sleep hygiene practices across the campus community. Sleep hygiene practices include habits and behaviors to help ensure good sleep quality and daytime alertness (National Sleep Foundation [NSF], 2018).
- Provide on-campus education about sleep health and the importance of sleep duration, sleep continuity or efficiency, timing of sleep, alertness/sleepiness, and satisfaction/quality of sleep (Buysse, 2014).
- Train faculty and staff on healthy sleep hygiene behaviors and how to have discussions with students about making sleep a priority.
- Develop policies and class schedules that promote and encourage healthy sleep practices (Hershner & Chervin, 2014).
- Conduct an environmental scan to identify characteristics in campus living areas that promote or hinder good sleep. Environments that are conducive to good sleep include: ability to dim lighting in residence halls,



temperature reduction at night to allow for optimal sleep, use of LED lights for lighting uniformity and energy efficiency (Broek, Cunningham, Kelly, Kielblock, & Prichard, 2014).

- Promote sleep around campus by including designated resting or napping areas, matching roommates with similar circadian rhythms, and regulating accessibility of campus services such as the library, athletic centers and dining halls (Broek et al., 2014).
- Offer specific “wind down” or “wake up” programming on campus (Broek et al., 2014).
- Assess availability of healthy sleep aids versus availability of pharmacologic sleep aids and/or caffeine (Broek et al., 2014). Consider suggesting faculty limit assignment deadlines to 10:00 p.m. or earlier.

ENDORSEMENT

The National Consortium for Building Health Academic Communities (NCBHAC) is a national organization dedicated to crafting and promoting a comprehensive approach to the health and well-being of students, faculty and staff. NCBHAC is dedicated to enhancing campus-wide wellness efforts, eliminating silos, and sharing best practices. NCBHAC has created a series of position papers devoted to helping institutions address the urgent health issues of the day. This position statement reflects the views of NCBHAC and serves only as a collection of recommendations and guidelines. The purpose of NCBHAC position papers is to assist academic institutions in creating wellness programming, advocating for resources, enhancing the academic mission of the institution, and getting broad support for wellness efforts.

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