Impact of Overtime and Long Work Hours on WC Injuries

A University of Massachusetts Medical School study concluded that people working in jobs with overtime schedules were associated with a 61% higher injury hazard rate compared to jobs without overtime. The study found greater risk of injury associated with work schedules exceeding 60 hours per week and 12 hours per day. These include the increased risk of hypertension, cardiovascular disease, fatigue, stress, depression, musculoskeletal disorders, chronic infections, diabetes, and general health complaints.

The study was conducted over 13 years and covered 5139 work related injuries and illnesses. Of those, 2799 occurred in jobs having exposure to at least one of the four exposure categories:

- Extended hours per week
- Extended hours per day
- Overtime
- Extended commute time

The researchers concluded that effective prevention of workplace injuries and illnesses requires a multifaceted approach that combines comprehensive hazard identification and control, ergonomic job design, worker training, monitoring medical treatment, competent supervision, and a workplace culture and organization that promotes optimal safety and health.

The results of the study suggest that special attention needs to be paid to establishing protective measures for people working overtime. They are:

- Periodic hazard identification inspections
- Changes in work organization to include periodic rest breaks
- Redesigning processes to avoid the need for overtime assignments
- Employing more people to work fewer hours each
- Employer sponsored health promotion programs
- Encouraging a healthy lifestyle

Employers have to take a hard look at the costs of having fewer employees doing more work. Injuries are becoming more expensive and implementation of proactive controls such as those described above will see a return on investment in more ways than just dollars.

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