Guidelines for Creating Supportive Environments

The following recommendations can help to create a supportive environment for shift workers by addressing the Shift Schedule Design, the Physical Work Environment, the Social Environment, and Staff Education.

1. Shift Schedule Design

a) Shift workers tend to adapt a “daytime” schedule on their days off in order to maintain their family/social life. When scheduling night shifts, consider the following:

   - 8 hour shifts: No more than 5 consecutive shifts on nights
   - 10 hour shifts: No more than 4 consecutive shifts on nights
   - 12 hour shifts: No more than 3 consecutive shifts on nights

b) Consider the time at which a shift starts and finishes. Early morning shifts are associated with shorter sleep and greater fatigue. It is advisable to avoid shift start times as early as 5:00 a.m. or 6:00 a.m. The social customs and desires of the specific workforce should be considered as well as the availability of public transportation. The safety on the streets, in terms of crime and violence, is another consideration.

c) Provide a rest period of at least 24 hours after each set of night shifts. The more consecutive nights worked, the more rest time should be given.

d) Consider the direction of rotation of shifts. It is recommended that shifts rotate forward from day to afternoon to night because circadian rhythms adjust better when moving ahead than backwards.

e) Inform shift workers of their work schedules well ahead of time so they and their families and friends can plan activities. Allow as much flexibility as possible for shift changes. Shift workers experience greater discord in their family and social lives than employees who work regular hours, and social and emotional well-being are related to job performance, productivity, and efficiency.

f) Keep schedules as simple and predictable as possible.

g) Avoid super short shift changes (less than 24 hours).
h) Build regular weekends off into the shift schedule.

i) Allow two nights of full sleep when switching from day to night shifts and vice versa.

j) Encourage interaction between workers and provide a means of contact for lone workers, particularly night workers.

k) Keep schedules flexible by allowing workers to trade shifts.

2. Physical Work Environment / Facilities

a) Give attention to the work environment. Keep workstations close together so that workers at night can remain in contact with one another. Allow for good lighting and ventilation.

b) Ensure temperature and lighting is appropriate and preferably adjustable.

c) Provide rest facilities where possible. Whenever a person must remain at work after a night shift to attend a meeting or a training session, providing rest facilities is advisable. When a night worker is "on call" and must remain in the building, it is advantageous for this person to be well rested rather than tired and bored.

d) Provide good cafeteria services so a balanced diet can be maintained. Nutritional needs differ between day shifts and other shifts because of circadian rhythms.

e) Consider having a fridge, microwave, sink/water for food preparation (separate from bathroom and sinks for other uses).

f) Provide healthy options in vending machines

g) Consider a healthy workplace food basket/container, with healthy snacks and an accompanying price list (e.g., applesauce, soup, granola bars, juice, and other non-perishable, easy to open, food items).

h) Consider having a supply of dishes, cutlery, and dish rack in the kitchen/kitchenette area that staff could use and keep clean.

i) Ensure the workplace and surroundings are well lit, safe and secure.
3. Social Environment

a) Consider offering facilities for social activities with the needs of the shift worker in mind. Recreational opportunities can be minimal for workers on "non-day" shifts.

b) Provide time off at "socially advantageous" times like weekends whenever possible, with at least two days off in a row.

c) As mentioned in #1e (Designing the Shift Schedule), inform shift workers of their work schedules well ahead of time so they and their families and friends can plan activities. Allow as much flexibility as possible for shift changes. Shift workers experience greater discord in their family and social lives than employees who work regular hours, and social and emotional well-being are related to job performance, productivity, and efficiency.

d) As mentioned in #1e (Designing the Shift Schedule), encourage interaction between workers and provide a means of contact for lone workers.

e) Consider access to quality day-care for shift workers' children. Some strain on all family members would be alleviated.

f) Consider offering facilities for activities such as recreation and staff social gatherings.

g) Encourage workers, or support workers, to organize groups within the workplace for various interests (e.g., Toastmasters, yoga classes, support groups).

h) Sponsor employee sports teams and leagues (e.g., company hockey league).

4. Staff Education

a) Educate employees on the potential health and safety effects of rotational shift work and what can be done to stop/lessen these effects. In particular, education in stress recognition and reduction techniques is helpful.

b) Provide workshops/information sessions and resources on stress management.

c) Provide workshops/information sessions and resources on communication and conflict resolution.
5. Other General Recommendations

a) Consider the needs of vulnerable workers, such as young/aging workers, or new and expectant mothers.

b) Consider the needs of workers with disabilities.

c) Provide training and information on the risks of shift work and ensure supervisors and management can recognize and effectively respond to problems, if present.

d) Provide accommodations to help employees eat more nutritiously (e.g., lunch room, microwave, cafeteria facilities, refrigeration, cooking facilities).

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