Catching Those Zs in the Hospital

What nurses can do to help.

Nurses can do several things to enhance relaxation and promote sleep for patients in the hospital. Some are rooted in common sense; many are based on evidence. Consider doing the following:

- Assess pain and advocate appropriate pain medicine.
- Partially close doors to patients' rooms to reduce outside light and noise.[1]
- Speak in low voices, especially at the nursing station.
- Stop using the unit's paging system at night.
- Institute a Sh-h-h-h Project[2] or a Silent Hospitals Help Healing (SHHH) program.[3]
- Suggest that the patient engage in some daytime physical activity, if appropriate. (Some experts believe insufficient daytime activity may contribute to insomnia.[4])
- Assess room temperature and adjust thermostat (or change the number of blankets) to the patient's preference.
- Play quiet, soothing music[5, 6]; use a white-noise machine to minimize ambient noise.
- Encourage use of relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or meditation.
- Provide massage (such as back massage). Effleurage—a type of massage that uses long, slow strokes—has been found to promote "biological and subjective relaxation."[7]
- Suggest a warm bath (immersion to the mid-thorax) before bedtime.[8]
- Encourage patients to avoid caffeine during evening hours; provide decaffeinated beverages at night.
- Time wound care, medication administration, and the taking of vital signs so as to minimize sleep disturbances.[9]
- Consider all of the above interventions before asking that a sleep-promoting medication be prescribed.

For more, see *Noise Control: A Nursing Team's Approach to Sleep Promotion,* February 2004.—*Carole A. Smyth, MSN, ANP-GNP, APRN,BC*

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