

December 2002 - POST



London Health Sciences Centre
NURSING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE COUNCIL (NPPC)
NEWSLETTER
SPECIAL UPDATE ON THE EXPLORING STRESS DIFFERENCES
IN NURSES STUDY UNDERWAY AT LHSC



In late summer more than 400 full-time, part-time, job share and casual nurses were randomly selected from the London Health Sciences (LHSC) employee database and a package for the “Exploring Stress Differences in Full-time and Part-time Nurses” study was sent out to the potential participants at their work address. To date, more than 120 nurses have consented to participate and are either in the process of collecting their saliva or have finished saliva collection for our research. To everyone who has helped out to date we would like to THANK YOU for your exceptional support for our study!!

If you have received a package and are interested in participating in this study, there is still time! All you need to do is complete the questionnaire supplied in the study package and return it to us in the self-addressed envelope. If you have misplaced your study package and you would like to participate, please either Sarah Dusky, the Project Co-ordinator at sdusky@uwo.ca or Dr. Michael Kerr at mkerr@uwo.ca and we would be happy to get another package out to you! All participants will receive a \$10 gift certificate to Tim Horton’s as a token of our appreciation for your contribution to our research study.

In addition to a study update, we would like to take this opportunity to point out that our study is not trying to determine whether or not there is a difference in stress levels between full and part-time nurses, but rather, we wish to identify and quantify any differences that do exist. We hope to make use of these stress differences to further develop a possible physiological biomarker for stress (salivary cortisol) that holds great promise for use in large-scale population health studies. We also hope to use the study results to help us identify possible ways in which we can reduce work-related stress for all nurses at LHSC. We sincerely hope that if you have any concerns about any aspect of the study, including its aims or objectives, that you will give us a call so that we can address them with you.

Purpose of the Study:

The main purposes of this study will be to explore the differences in stress levels between 100 full and 100 part-time staff nurses and to determine if any relationships exist between the major questionnaire instruments for work and life stressors and salivary cortisol, a potential biomarker for stress. We intended to address two key issues. Firstly, we will examine a staffing variable of relevance to nursing (full-time versus part-time), and secondly, we will be providing information about possible physiological effects of stressful conditions that nurses may be exposed to. A better understanding of the consequences of stress in the work environment could lead to the development of more effective intervention strategies to improve nurses’ health and well being, job satisfaction and reduce stress at work. Research of this nature could help inform programs designed to assist in the attraction and retention of nurses, an important consideration in light of the current shortage our health care system now faces. The purpose of the study is not to determine if part-time jobs should replace full-time jobs. Rather, our research is meant to inform

policy and decision-makers about important aspects of nursing work that might be contributing to stress and to help unravel the still largely unknown biological pathways that exist between work stress and health and well-being. Recent developments in the field methods for collecting cortisol have only now made such a study possible.

Description of Research:

If you agree to participate in this study, we will arrange for you to complete self-administered questionnaire that will address work and life stressors, self-reported health outcomes and some basic demographic information such as age, sex, etc. This questionnaire should take about 45 minutes to complete. In addition to the questionnaire, we will provide you with a simple kit designed to allow you to collect your own saliva samples and provide with a simple diary to use at that time. Saliva samples will be obtained by using the provided cotton swabs (Salivettes®) which are placed in the mouth for about 30 seconds at 1, 4, 9, and 11 hours after waking and again just before bedtime, on each of 2 work and 2 non-work days, for a total of 20 samples (i.e. five samples from each of four days). These samples will be stored in a secure location before they are shipped to an independent reference laboratory where they will be analyzed for cortisol levels only. The samples will be destroyed after statistical analysis is complete. No other chemicals will ever be tested for in the saliva samples you provide. It is estimated that the total time involved in with your participation in this study is about 2-3 hours, including time for informed consent, the questionnaire and sample collection. The questionnaire and samples will be returned by regular post or collected by the study coordinator at the worksite, depending on your preference.

Eligibility:

CFull and Part-time Acute Care Registered Nurses

CPermanently employed at LHSC for at least six month

CBetween the ages of 20 - 65.

CPeople with any of the following are ineligible to participate: pregnant women; anyone taking oral steroids such as prednisone, or dexamethasone; or individuals with Cushing's syndrome or Addison's disease (i.e. cortisol secretion problems).

Participation:

Participation in this health study is entirely voluntary and there are no known risks involved in participating in this study. The results from this study may however inform the investigating team about the differences in physiological stress levels between full-time and part-time nurses and determine if any relationships exist between work and life stressors and salivary cortisol levels. You may refuse to: participate, provide saliva samples, answer any particular questions or withdraw entirely from the research study at anytime for any reason with no effect on your employment status. If you are already participating in another study at this time, please inform the project coordinator immediately so it can be determined if it is appropriate for you to participate in this study as well. In recognition of your contribution to the project you will receive a \$10 gift certificate to Tim Horton's.

Confidentiality:

The principal investigator and project coordinator will be the only people with access to your name and address. This information will be kept in a secure location and will not be disclosed to anyone nor will your name or any personal identifiers be used on study questionnaires. Once you agree to participate in this study, you will be identified by research code (e.g. FT 000 D1T1) on all questionnaires, and vials for saliva collection. The results of this study may be described in oral and written presentations and may be published in professional journals. However, at all times the results will be presented in a combined group format only and no personal identifiers

will be used. Data on individual subjects will not be released in any format. It is important to note that, once the saliva samples have been analyzed, and statistical analyses are complete, your personal information and your saliva samples will be destroyed.

Exploring Stress Differences Between Full-time and Part-time Nurses: Question and Answers:

Q. When is the study being conducted?

The study is beginning in July of 2002 and we hope to have the field work completed by October 2002.

Q. What will happen if the study indicates that full-time workers have higher job stress and cortisol levels as compared to part-time workers? Will that mean that my job as a full-time nurse could be threatened?

No. Through this study, we will explore the relationship between job stress and cortisol levels. If our research finds that elevated cortisol levels are related to job stress among full-time nurses, full-time positions will not be threatened as they are an integral part of the hospital structure and the workforce in general. Our findings will be only a part of the larger body of knowledge that we hope will eventually be used to design and implement effective intervention strategies aimed at improving nurses' health and well being, by reducing job related stress.

Q. What will I be asked to do and how much time is involved?

If you agree to participate in this study, we will arrange for you to complete self-administered questionnaire that will address work and life stressors, self-reported health outcomes and some basic demographic information such as age, sex, etc. This questionnaire should take about 45 minutes to complete. In addition to the questionnaire, we will provide you with a simple kit and sample log designed to allow you to collect 20 of your own saliva samples over the course of 4 days. Your total time commitment to this study is approximately 2-3 hours.

Q. How will I collect my saliva for the study?

We will provide you with a kit designed to allow you to collect your own saliva samples and provide with a sample log to use at that time. Saliva samples will be obtained by using the cotton swabs (Salivettes ®) provided which are placed in the mouth for about 30 seconds at 1, 4, 9, and 11 hours after waking and again just before bedtime, on each of 2 work and 2 non-work days, for a total of 20 samples (i.e. five samples from each of four days).

Q. Aside from cortisol testing, will any other chemical analysis be conducted on my saliva samples?

Your saliva sample will only be tested for cortisol levels. No other chemicals will ever be tested for in the saliva samples you provide.

Q. What will happen to my saliva samples once the study is complete?

Once the study is complete and your samples have been analyzed for cortisol, the samples will be destroyed and under no circumstances will any further analysis occur.

Q. What will happen if you use the data obtained from my saliva in a presentation or publication?

The results of this study may be described in oral and written presentations and may be published in professional journals. However, at all times the results will be presented in a combined group format only and no personal identifiers will be used. Data on individual subjects will not be released in any format. It is important to note that, once the saliva samples have been analyzed, and statistical analyses are complete, your personal information and your saliva samples will be destroyed.

Contact Persons for Participants:

If you have any further questions about the study entitled: Exploring Stress Differences Between Full-time and Part-time Nurses is study, please feel free to contact the following individuals:

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For more information on either the Institute for Work & Health (IWH), or the Nursing Effectiveness, Utilization and Outcomes Research Unit (NRU), at the University of Toronto, check out their websites. IWH can be reached at: <http://www.iwh.on.ca> <http://www.iwh.on.ca> and the NRU can be reached at: <http://www-fhs.mcmaster.ca/nru/>.