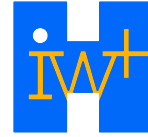




Occupational  
Cancer  
Research  
Centre



Institute  
for Work &  
Health

## Interventions mitigating health risks of shift work: Current knowledge and workplace practices

### Background

In April 2010, the Occupational Cancer Research Centre and the Institute for Work & Health hosted 'The Health Effects of Shift Work,' a symposium that described and evaluated the state of scientific evidence linking shift work and health. There were several presentations from international experts that focused on the occurrence of shift work, biological explanations, animal studies, and the impact of shift work on worker injury, heart disease, fertility and cancer. Following the symposium, plain-language summaries were made available online and a collection of papers were submitted for publication in scientific journals.

Shift work is essential for many industries and sectors in Canada. According to estimates from CAREX Canada, approximately 13% of Canadian workers work a regular night or rotating shift schedule. This amounts to nearly 2.1 million workers. The industry groups with the largest numbers of people working regular night or rotating shifts are: manufacturing (n = 461,000; 22% of industry), trades (n = 396,000; 16% of industry), health care and social assistance (n = 326,000; 21% of industry), hospitality (n = 258,000; 23% of industry), and public administration (n = 136,000; 15% of industry).

The links between shift work and work-related injury and disease have been studied in detail. However, the possible ways to reduce these harmful health effects are much less known. The Occupational Cancer Research Centre and the Institute for Work & Health are helping to fill this knowledge gap in a project that asks the broad questions: ***What is the current state of scientific knowledge and workplace practices about interventions to prevent illness and injury related to shift work? How can this knowledge be applied in the workplace?***

As part of this project, we are holding a symposium about promising interventions for the prevention of injuries and illness related to shift work. The goals of this meeting are to provide new information and an understanding of workplace practices, generate ideas on how to move forward in workplaces, and identify future research needs. There will be presentations by experts on three different types of promising interventions: shift scheduling, work schedule flexibility, and controlled exposure to light. The breakout workshops will offer a forum for workers, unions, employers, policy makers, and researchers to discuss prevention in the context of the healthcare, manufacturing, and public safety sectors in Ontario. Altogether, this knowledge exchange will enhance the collective understanding of workplace practices for preventing injury and disease related to shift work in Ontario and pinpoint areas of investigation that are needed to advance the field more broadly.