

# The CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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A publication of Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, a non-profit for the well-being of corrections staff and their families.

Helping correctional agencies become workplaces of choice where everyone wants to be employed!

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DWCO 18 Years 2003-2021

## Recharge

By Correctional Officer Jason Timothy Roy

**M**y phone rings. It's my friend, my best friend. I know what is about to happen because I have been waiting and hoping for this exact phone call and conversation. I answer the phone, but not in the usual excited way. I am deflated and fatigued. It's been some time since we have spoken. I have been avoiding reality. My best friend is reality. It hurts to avoid reality.

"Jay, come in to see me in the office."

He didn't call me by my nickname, which he gave me.

"I know Al, I'm on my way."



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## Recharge *cont.*

I didn't call him by his nickname, which by the way, *HE* gave to me to call him.

I feel like there has been a warrant issued for my life and the officer is coming. There is no more avoiding. I am relieved. This is what I had hoped for. I went to his office. He let me in. No words were exchanged. He sat in his chair beside his desk. I sat down in the chair across from him. I could not look at him in his eyes. I felt shame and every other gross, uncomfortable emotional and mental feeling there is. But, in the moment just before I mustered the energy to look at my best friend in his eyes, I was drawn to a framed quote, centered on the mantle of the fireplace, located just behind his right shoulder. It simply stated,

**"YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE:**

**No one is coming to save you.**

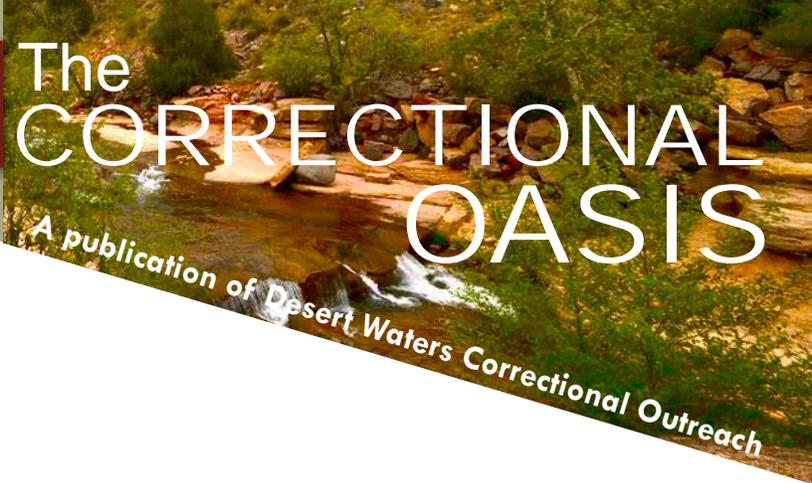
**This life of yours is 100% your responsibility."**

I blinked and read that quote again. I was at attention. A life altering moment in this universe. It was at that moment I realized that I was responsible. And I made the decision to save myself. I looked my best friend in his eyes, called him by his nickname, that he gave me to call him, and said, "Okay, now what."

Moments before this phone call even happened, I was in the basement of my house. I picked up my old baseball glove. The leather was dried out and needed some oil. My father showed me how to oil my glove when I was a kid. I could not find the old can of Blue Ribbon Neatsfoot Compound Oil that "softens, waterproofs and preserves all leather goods." I cried uncontrollably in my glove instead. Gushing, snotty, sniveling, and gasping for air type of crying. Now my glove was "oiled."

I sat on the stool at my workbench. I thought it was time to clean my firearm. I disassembled it, cleaned and oiled all the parts, not with tears, with the proper oil. I reassembled my firearm. And that is when I became stuck. Stuck with the questions: What do I do? What would happen? What if?

So I racked the slide of my firearm and dry fired it. I felt the pull of the trigger and heard the click of firing pin. I racked the slide again, but this time I put the muzzle of my firearm to the temple of my head and dry fired it. I didn't feel the pull of the trigger. I didn't hear the click of the firing pin. I did not hear anything.



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## Recharge *cont.*

I sat staring at the first live round of ammunition in the magazine on top of the workbench. I looked up at the exposed unfinished ceiling of the basement. My bedroom was on the floor above. An unforced conscious breath overwhelmed me. It felt like that first gulp of air you take after being crushed by a wave, held underwater and not knowing if you are going to fill your lungs with air ever again or drown.

I sat and waited, hoping for my phone to ring, hoping for that phone call from my best friend, whose nickname was given to me by him to call him by.

And the phone did ring and my best did call. He later told me that he called based on his "informed intuition." Nothing less than a life-saving miracle.

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation

2019, 2021 © Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC

**O**ne of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is that custody staff have been forced to work overtime more than ever before (for over a year now), due to coworkers being ill or on quarantine, or due to increased turnover. This amount of overtime has reached frightening levels—and it was already high in several jurisdictions—and is bound to gravely affect staff's performance and health. This is an extremely complex situation as the nation is facing many firsts that are no one's fault. Yet, as we'll see in the article below, insufficient sleep severely undermines health and functioning, and can even be deadly.

*This article is a revised version of the article by the same title that was printed in the [September 2019](#) and the [October 2019](#) issues of the *Correctional Oasis*.*

Last week I heard a corrections employee chuckle and say, "I'll sleep when I'm dead." And yesterday I was told of a case of a Correctional Officer who got back to work after her maternity leave and was immediately scheduled for three consecutive 16-hour days of mandatory overtime. How much sleep is she going to be getting, given that she also needs to take care of her infant child when she gets home? And how might her lack of sufficient sleep affect the quality of her performance at work, and her functioning and relating at home?

### **What is Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation?**

Many of us do not think much about sleeping less than the 7-8 hours per 24-hour cycle that most people require in order to function "well enough." And from my conversations over the years with corrections personnel of all ranks and job descriptions, I have noted that most of them are not aware of the safety, health risks and cost associated with insufficient sleep.

However, insufficient sleep—or, more formally, chronic partial sleep deprivation—is a case of "what we don't

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation cont.

know (and act upon) WILL indeed hurt us, sooner or later.”

The sobering truth is that getting shorted on sleep on a regular basis does in fact contribute to the development of physical and psychological health conditions.

More specifically, what does partial chronic sleep deprivation mean?

*Partial* means that the sleep deprivation is only in part. It is not total sleep deprivation (as would be in the case of torture, as, for example, during interrogations, when prisoners of war have not been allowed to sleep at all).

It is *chronic*, that is, it has been going on for a long time—for months and, in some cases, for years. It's not a one-time occurrence or an occurrence over a short period of time.

*Sleep deprivation* refers to not getting the amount and quality of sleep needed to remain healthy and to function well.

So let us examine this issue, its consequences, and possible ways to address it.

Both the quantity and quality of sleep of corrections custody staff are very much a casualty when shift work and overtime enter the picture.

I emphasize quality as well as quantity of sleep, because both matter.

By sleep quantity I mean sleeping 7-8 hours per 24-hour cycle—what most people need in order to feel rested upon awakening.

By sleep quality I mean being able to cycle four to six times through all four stages of sleep—Stages 1 and 2 (light sleep), Stage 3 (deep sleep) and Stage R (Rapid Eye Movement sleep). Each of these four stages serves essential functions. Sleeping less than 7-8 consecutive hours per 24-hour cycle will not allow for the cycling through all these stages and repeatedly, as needed in order for us to feel rested upon awakening.

Corrections custody staff who work overtime on a frequent basis do suffer from partial chronic sleep

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation cont.

deprivation. In some jurisdictions, custody staff work mandatory overtime shifts 2, 3 or even more times weekly, for months and even for years on end, severely affecting their ability to get more than 3-5 hours of sleep per 24-hour cycle. Moreover, changes to shift schedules result in irregular sleep routines, which can affect staff's ability to fall and/or stay asleep. And it is often difficult for night shift workers to adapt to sleeping well during the day.

Anyone else working ridiculously long hours. We are show short handed in our state, we are all working mandatory 16 hour days. 6 days. I love what I do but man, it takes a toll. I've been doing this for 3 years.

👍👎👤 20

22 Comments

This is a Facebook post that was emailed to DWCO on the 15th of July, 2019.

Here is some of what staff has said about the noxious effects of working mandatory overtime.

*"Due to mandatory overtime I don't get to see my family, as I often have to work 16 hours. My commute home is a challenge to stay awake. I have almost fallen asleep behind the wheel. When I get home, I try to go to sleep right away because I get up 5-6 hours later, sometimes less, because I am too wired to sleep due to stress and due to drinking caffeinated beverages throughout the night to stay alert. When I am mandated I am not able to take my nighttime medication, so I fall behind in my schedule in taking my daytime meds. My health deteriorates. I am tired and irritable. At work, I am not as alert as I want to be, fighting off sleep and fatigue. I can be doing a back to back mandatory or maybe get one day in between. If I get a mandatory on my Friday, I spend one day catching up on my sleep. At times I have to call in sick to get some rest. This impacts the shift because now other Officers have to be mandated to fill my position." ~ Anonymous<sup>1</sup>*

*"You are not mentally prepared to work for at least 16 hours. I like to know ahead of time when I am working overtime. It is hard to work 16 hours and then get up again the next morning prepared to deal with the inmate*

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation cont.

*population. You have to be able to quickly diffuse situations. I have trouble sleeping, so I am already not getting the required amount of sleep. Mandatory overtime makes it worse. I also have not brought enough food to have two meals, so I begin feeling sluggish. Imagine the effects after 16 hours of dealing with various personalities. Tempers flare. Things that would not normally bother you are enhanced ten times and incidents get out of control quickly. Inmates also know when you are working overtime, and they will use it to their advantage. Sometimes they purposely bait you into arguments, so that they have a reason to be disruptive." ~ Anonymous*

### Effects of Insufficient Sleep

Our need for sleep is a biological necessity. If we consider Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, sleep is at the bottom of the needs pyramid, in the same category as oxygen, water, food and suitable temperature. In other words, sleep is a non-negotiable for our functioning and, ultimately, for survival. (Think of car wrecks when people fell asleep while driving.) Higher-order needs, such as need for love and esteem, become of secondary importance, if the need for sleep is not being sufficiently met.

*"I almost fell asleep driving home after 4 mandatory double shifts in a row during the Xmas holidays. I live almost an hour away from the institution and only get 3 hours of sleep between mandates." ~ Anonymous*

*"I once lost three days' pay because we had so much comp time (hour for hour, no time and a half), that we went over the allowed limit. Some staff lost even more than that. Our health suffered, our families suffered, our work suffered, but true to the correctional officers' unspoken code, we 'handled it.'" ~ Anonymous*

*"Frequent mandatory overtime results in staff's 'I don't care, I don't have a choice to be here' attitude. They don't enforce rules as they should because they are run down. Due to mandatory overtime we LIVE at work. It becomes*

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation cont.

*our second home. Departments of Corrections wonder why we have all these 'overfamiliarity' cases across the country. Not every staff gets involved with inmates because of mandatory overtime, but I believe it contributes in some cases." ~ Anonymous*

Not getting enough sleep negatively impacts brain function, mental health, and physical health. Some examples of consequences of insufficient sleep are:

- **Cognitive impairments:** including alertness, attention, concentration, reaction time, reasoning, and problem solving, and working memory, possibly resulting in errors, declined productivity, and accidents
- **Mood disturbances:** irritability, poor tolerance of frustration, anxiety, depression
- **Physical symptoms/disease:** increased inflammation (associated with obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, stroke, cardiovascular disease, some cancers, elevated mortality risk); low energy; Alzheimer-like neuron changes.

*"Mandatory overtime makes me feel like I am running at half speed with no hope of getting caught up. It is even worse if I have had something planned or it occurs on a holiday. Loved ones do not always understand when you have to call and cancel an arranged function because you have to stay at work. There is absolutely no consideration of the officer's circumstances when overtime is mandated. The more it happens, the worse it gets. I am not sure you ever mentally recover. It is always worse the next time it happens, no matter the time in between. It is one of the reasons I left custody, even though I am less safe in my current assignment. It is also one of the reasons that officers resign." ~ Anonymous*

According to the [CDC](#), sleep deprivation affects our functioning in ways that are very similar to being under the influence of alcohol. The effects on driving of being awake for 18 hours are equivalent to a blood alcohol content of 0.05%. And the effects on driving of being awake for 24 hours are equivalent to a blood alcohol content

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation *cont.*

of 0.10%. (Drivers with blood alcohol levels of 0.08% or higher are considered legally impaired in the U.S.—driving under the influence.)

No administrator would allow employees to work while under the influence of alcohol. Yet, across the nation, correctional custody staff are functioning “under the influence,” often on a regular basis, not due to alcohol intoxication, but due to chronic partial sleep deprivation, because of working mandatory overtime hours.

These concerns are highlighted by the findings of a recent very large study.<sup>2</sup> Data on 110,496 college students, including 8,462 varsity athletes, were gathered from the 2011–2014 waves of the National College Health Assessment. Statistical analyses controlled for age, sex, race/ethnicity, survey year, insomnia and depressed mood. Insufficient sleep was measured by the number of nights that students reported that they did not feel rested upon awakening. Mental health symptoms were measured by the number of symptoms reported during the prior month.

Results showed that **insufficient sleep was strongly associated with mental health symptoms.** Additionally, **a dose-response relationship** was found between insufficient sleep and reported mental health symptoms. That is, **with each additional night of insufficient sleep, reported mental health symptoms increased.**

Specifically, the results showed that with each additional night of insufficient sleep, risk for depressed mood was increased by 21%; risk for hopelessness and anger was increased by 24%; risk for anxiety and desire to self-harm was increased by 25%; risk for functional problems was increased by 28%; and risk for thoughts of suicide was increased by 28%.

These are highly disturbing and eye-opening findings, as they show that our brain’s health is critically dependent on getting sufficient sleep—and this is a non-negotiable reality.

If insufficient sleep has such a detrimental and cumulative impact on young, healthy adults, how much

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation *cont.*

more might the mental health of perhaps not so healthy middle-aged corrections staff be affected by insufficient sleep?

Other questions that arise are: what role might insufficient sleep play in corrections officers' elevated rates of depression, anxiety and suicide? And what role might insufficient sleep play in a corrections officer's outbursts of anger, hostile interactions with offenders or other staff, excessive use of force, not performing their tasks as per policy, making mistakes, or having accidents on and off the job?

In 2019, a tragic motor vehicle accident occurred that was possibly associated with chronic partial sleep deprivation due to mandatory overtime. And a high-profile inmate suicide was also linked to staff working mandatory overtime, which possibly led to policy lapses.

These examples of negative outcomes do not even take into consideration what happens to corrections officers' personal lives due to them being at work so much, and missing out on family life. If the family unit falls apart due to their chronic absence (because they are at work or are sleeping when they are at home), corrections officers lose their most important support system, which renders them highly vulnerable to substance abuse and other psychological disorders, and also to suicide. And these examples do not tap into how irritability and moodiness brought on by partial chronic sleep deprivation may destroy staff's personal relationships.

### Where Do We Go from Here?

Research has firmly established that chronic partial sleep deprivation impairs physical and mental health and functioning.

Yet, across the nation, custody staff often suffer from chronic partial sleep deprivation due to being

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation *cont.*

mandated to work overtime on a regular and long-term basis.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in terms of the number of correctional staff affected and the multi-faceted health and functioning impact, **partial chronic sleep deprivation due to mandatory overtime work may be one of the greatest dangers to operational safety and security of correctional institutions and the communities around them, and to staff's well-being.**

To maintain the safety and security of correctional institutions, and to promote the well-being of custody staff, correctional agencies **MUST** make it a priority to look for ways to decrease the use of mandatory overtime. Consuming more Red Bull or Monster energy drinks is not the answer. **More employees are needed to do the job.**

In conclusion, some solutions for the reduction of mandatory overtime work (outside of COVID-19 issues) may be found in improved staff retention through increased pay, benefits, resources, staff development and career opportunities, and through a positive workplace culture in terms of coworker relationships, supervisor-subordinate relationships, and certain agency policies.

In light of the COVID-19 realities, ways to combat staff shortages include the provision of adequate Personal Protective Equipment (such as N95 masks that are changed out daily, goggles, gloves, sanitizers, cleaning and disinfecting supplies), the use of light technology to disinfect facility areas, and policies that promote safe offender management practices and sanitary conditions.

And now, in closing, here are the thoughts of Corporal William Young on working mandatory overtime on a regular basis.

*"Correctional Officers are stressed out and stretched as thin as they can go. Officers are burned out and unhealthy and suffer because **we are not allowed sufficient time to decompress. We feel like hostages.** We feel like no one is listening, and that administration does not care, and that there is no end, no relief in sight.*

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation *cont.*

**Some will quit. Some will make grave errors in judgment.** And some will stay and keep fighting. But all of them, **all of us, are wearing thin.** If I feel like I am drowning, if I feel like I am in a situation that is never going to change, how can I get better? At some point you just have to let go and swallow the water.

The feeling of hopelessness can lead to all types of unintended consequences. Because we are spending so much time at work, so much time locked up, we have stopped participating in activities and events that help counteract the negative impact of our work environment.

Many of us have forgone important family functions or have been forced to cancel doctors' appointments because of mandatory overtime. Imagine having to choose between your child's swearing in ceremony for the United States Navy or disciplinary action for refusing to work an ordered overtime. Imagine feeling anxious about refusing overtime because you have to go to a doctor's appointment at the VA that was scheduled over a year ago.

So, if we can't even make our doctor's appointment or our child's musical program, if we don't have the time to sleep for more than four or five hours a night, how are we supposed to find the time to coach basketball or to volunteer at the local food pantry or serve communion at mass?

The only way to offset the negative impact that this profession can have on us is to participate in the positive. And if we don't have time to enjoy life outside of these walls, if we can't eat dinner with the family and walk our dog and go on our annual hunting trip, how are we supposed to maintain a positive posture while we are inside the walls?

In other words, if our home life is suffering, if we are neglecting our duties outside of work because we are working overtime, if we are unhappy, how are we supposed to be happy when we are on the clock, how can we have true job satisfaction?

**It doesn't matter what type of resources you have in place for your staff if they can't go home when they want to.** You can tell me to hydrate and meditate and suggest that I eat better and run more, but, **after working back to back 16-hour shifts all I want to do is sit on my porch and talk to my family for 15 minutes before I have to sleep for 4 hours and go do it all over again.**

You don't have to recognize me as a first responder. **Just figure out a way that I can go home at the end of my shift.** Recognize that **I am doing a very dangerous and thankless job on 3-4 hours of sleep.**

## Mandatory Overtime and Partial Chronic Sleep Deprivation *cont.*

*Understand that **I have been on my feet for 16 hours and I have been awake for 30.** Understand that **we only care about one thing, and that one thing is going home.***

### References

<sup>1</sup>Anonymous quote first reported in the March 2009 issue of the Correctional Oasis.

<sup>2</sup>Ramsey, T., Athey, A., Ellis, J., Tubbs, A., Turner, R., Killgore, W. D. S., Warlick, C., Alfonso-Miller, P., and Grandner, M. A. (2019). Dose-response relationship between insufficient sleep and mental health symptoms in collegiate student athletes and non-athletes. *SLEEP*, 42 (Abstract Supplement): A362.

<sup>3</sup>Milligan-Saville, J.S., Tan, L., Gayed, A., et al. Workplace mental health training for managers and its effect on sick leave in employees: a cluster randomized controlled trial. *Lancet Psychiatry* 2017; published online Oct 11. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(17\)30372-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30372-3).

### Next DWCO Online Trainings Open to Staff of All Corrections Agencies

**06-09 April & 12-14 April** – Online Instructor Training “From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™.”

**10-14 May & 07-11 Jun** – Online Training “The Supportive Correctional Supervisor™.”

**30 Aug-03 Sep & 27 Sep-01 Oct** – Online Training “The Supportive Correctional Supervisor™.”

**21-24 Sep** – Online Training “Treating Correctional Employees and their Families.”

**18-21 Oct & 25-27 Oct** – Online Instructor Training “True Grit: Building Resilience in Corrections Professionals™.”

**30 Nov, 01-03 Dec & 06-08 Dec** – Online Instructor Training “From Corrections Fatigue to Fulfillment™.”

## Feedback from the Trenches

I appreciate all that Desert Waters does for the men and women in the corrections field. The well-being of our staff is very important. I took on my staff's well-being for nearly 16 years. I definitely hope that my agency continues to provide our staff with the material that you and your staff have developed. Without you knowing it, your material has saved countless lives, enabled many staff to reach their retirement goal, enabled staff to open up to family and friends, and, in some cases, made people see that sometimes corrections is not the career field that best suits them. I look forward to reading the monthly issues of Correctional Oasis, as so many of our staff can relate to the many stories and find the articles very useful. Thanks again for all that you all do! Your organization is a very needed one, especially in today's environment.

**Lieutenant Nick Angelini**

# The CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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## IN MEMORIAM

**Grace Bellamy**, Sargent,  
**Tracey Adams**, Correctional Officer,  
**Mango Chakanyuka**, Corrections Officer,  
**Stacy Crosby**, Engineering Specialist III,  
**Timoteo "Tim" Cruz**, Corrections Officer,  
**John Maluvani**, Corrections Officer,  
**Moses Rima**, Corrections Officer,  
**Faith Nyapokoto**, Corrections Officer,  
**Miguel Gonzalez**, Corrections Officer,

Georgia Department of Corrections  
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Cuyahoga County Sheriff's Office  
Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services  
Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services  
Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services  
Florida Department of Corrections

# CONTACT US

Caterina Spinaris, PhD, LPC  
Executive Director

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, Inc.

431 East Main Street,  
P.O. Box 355, Florence, CO 81226  
(719) 784-4727

<https://desertwaters.com>

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## Quote of the Month

"When your why is big enough,  
you will find your how."

~ Les Brown

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## DWCO Mission

"Advancing the well-being of correctional staff and their families, and the health of correctional agencies, through data-driven, skill-based training."

Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, Inc., is a non-profit corporation which helps correctional agencies counter Corrections Fatigue in their staff by cultivating a healthier workplace climate and a more engaged workforce through targeted skill-based training and research.

## MANY THANKS

**Thank you for supporting the work  
of Desert Waters with your contributions.**

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