

# Study says night shift increases cancer risk

BY STEPHANIE HALL  
Staff Reporter

A convenience store graveyard shift and its safety risks might scare employees, but cancer might now overshadow robbery as workers' greatest threat.

Overnight shift work could potentially cause cancer because it disrupts the body's circadian rhythm, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

In 1987, Richard Stevens, a cancer epidemiologist and professor at the University of Connecticut, first discovered a link between cancer and light disturbances in sleep. Recent studies performed on nurses and airline crews linked cancer specifically to night shifts, according to a USA Today article.

Fred Shaffer, professor of psychology at Truman and specialist in physiological psychology, said the disruption of the body's circadian rhythm is the main cause for the link of late-night shifts to cancer.

"[The circadian rhythm] is an about 24-hour ... rhythm that determines wakefulness and vital signs," Shaffer said.

This cycle also cues when different hormones are released. Melatonin is a hormone that usually is released at night and can act as a tumor suppressant, Shaffer said.

"There are cells in our retinas and eyes called ganglion cells," Shaffer said. "These cells are light-sensitive, so they allow the pineal gland to know when it's dark, and we are able to trigger melatonin this way."

When workers switch to a night shift, they are unable to produce the proper amount of melatonin during their body's cycle because of the lighting. Many workers try to reproduce this part of their circadian

rhythm by sleeping in the dark. However, melatonin production is not the same at different parts of the cycle. The circadian rhythm also affects the body in other ways.

"There may be considerable stress that comes with a night shift," Shaffer said. "This can lead to higher levels of stress hormones. One of these stress hormones is called cortisol. The higher and sustained cortisol levels can suppress immunity. What that means is that the body does a poor job of surveillance for cancer and a poor job of controlling and destroying the cancer cells once they're detected."

Shaffer said studies show this disruption of the body's sleep can lead to a higher rate of breast cancer in women and prostate cancer in men.

"These findings, if they are in fact valid, would suggest that night-shift work is one of the most powerful carcinogens that we know of in the sense of promoting cancer," Shaffer said. "Except instead of being a substance that we ingest, it would be a high-risk behavior."

Many people accept high-risk behavior, including other possible carcinogens like tanning beds and exhaust fumes, as part of everyday life.

Senior Hugo Fernandez works the late shift at Dobson's hall desk. One night a week, Fernandez works from 10:30 p.m. to 6 a.m. checking identification at the door.

"I work this shift because I don't have any classes on Friday," Fernandez said. "I built my schedule that way."

Fernandez said that when he was about 8 years old, he was diagnosed with insomnia. He said he has always had an abnormal sleep schedule.

"I'll go to bed at bizarre hours," Fernandez said. "I'll



Former Kirksville Manor Care worker Danyelle Davis used to work late-night shifts. She said she would continue to work third shifts if she could, despite what researchers say about cancer risk.

go to bed one day at 12:30 then the next day at 3 a.m., even if I have to work the next day. It doesn't matter."

Fernandez said he tries to

get about six hours of sleep per night. He said he usually goes to sleep while it is still dark outside, but after that, only blinds separate him from the sun.

"I'm not really worried about it at all," Fernandez said. "I think if I had to do it more often, I would, but it's just once a week." Fernandez said the only thing

he plans to change is the night he is going to take the late-night shift this semester. Like many night-shift workers, Fernandez finds more short-term benefits to his job that outweigh long-term problems like cancer.

Abby Porter, a night stock supervisor at Hy-Vee, said she loves her job's haphazard hours. She works full-time, five nights a week, usually from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

"I have an eight-year-old daughter, so when I get off work, I can get her ready for school and sleep during [her] classes, so I can spend time with her when she gets back," Porter said.

Porter said she tries to get between four and eight hours of sleep. She has two windows in her bedroom but has heavy blinds to keep light from entering, she said.

"At first, I had a little trouble making the switch, but now I'm used to it," Porter said. "I wouldn't go back to day-shift work."

Danyelle Davis, Kirksville resident and Kirksville Manor Care employee, used to work the third shift at the care center and said she would go back to that shift if she could.

"I enjoyed working the third shift," she said. "I mean no one was there to bother you."

Although late-night shifts have been linked to cancer, many people see this as just another addition to an endless list of causes of cancer. However, researchers still find it important to learn about how to reduce the risks. Some companies are researching colored lighting and its impact on melatonin production, according to MSNBC.

Shaffer said reducing the risk requires common sense when making shut-eye decisions.

"Get the amount of sleep you need, and try to get it consistently," Shaffer said.

# Online sites challenge reality of relationships

BY VALERIE SPENCER  
Staff Reporter

Bars and parties aren't the only places to meet people.

Since the dawn of the Internet age, a new world of opportunities for fun, friendship and dating has opened up. Social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace and chatrooms offer a relaxed way for students to become acquainted with others. Those who are more serious about making connections can join dating sites such as Match.com or eHarmony.

Freshman Amanda Piner said she met her boyfriend, freshman Corey Moon, on MySpace. They saw each other's pictures on a mutual friend's Web page, began talking through MySpace and eventually decided to meet, Piner said.

"I'm really shy, so normally I wouldn't do something like that," she said. "But since we had talked for so long before — we talked for a few months at least before — I was pretty comfortable when we actually did meet."

Piner said she felt more at ease because a friend of hers already knew him, so she knew she wasn't meeting someone who wasn't who he claimed to be.

"Some people get on MySpace and meet these random people, but in my case, I knew he was an actual real person — I wasn't just talking to some crazy person," she said.

Although meeting online might be

simpler, a real-life encounter is more personal, Piner said.

"I know it's easier to talk to people over the Internet, but I think it's just better to establish a face-to-face connection and be able to talk to them that way," she said. "You lose a sense of connection [over the Internet]."

Senior Robyn Skinner also has given meeting others online a try. She said she started meeting people online during her first experiences with the Internet when she was 12 years old.

"I was into the AOL chatrooms when I was younger," Skinner said. "... I made lots of friends there that would always be on every day, one of whom I still haven't met yet, Ramona, who's one of my really good friends. We still have never met in person, but we send each other Christmas cards."

Skinner said she recently started meeting people through a hip-hop poetry Web site and that she has been to New York twice to meet her online friends and attend a hip-hop poetry bash.

The first time she went to New York, an online friend's parents paid for her plane ticket, she said.

"They were going on vacation, and he [my friend] couldn't go, so they were like, 'Why don't you fly out that girl you're always talking to?'" Skinner said. "So they did, ... and then we met up with some of our other buddies and just hung out. It was a good time."

Skinner said online relationships develop differently than person-to-

person relationships.

"It's just different with Internet buddies because you can tell them everything," she said. "They don't know any people that you know, and it's like, who are they going to tell? I'm kind of closer to them than I am with my real friends who I see every day. ... I mean, my Internet buddies are real friends, they're just not tangible."

Brian Krylowicz, director of University Counseling Services, said he could see why meeting people online has become so popular in recent years.

"I hear the line here at Truman a lot, 'There's no one here like me,'" he said. "And so I think online is a better chance to connect to someone on some level. It's a little bit safer environment in that you're not putting so much of yourself out there."

Although getting to know others online might be fun, students must remember it's easy to be deceitful online, Krylowicz said.

"[When talking] online we don't usually put out all of our negative attributes," he said. "So I think [meeting] in person is a lot more real — there's a lot more information we gather, where online you can be a perfect person kind of quality."

Krylowicz said the lack of exterior information available when meeting people online gives more weight to the words they choose to use.

with people via the Internet can be dangerous, Krylowicz said it's a good idea for students to trust their natural instincts or to get a second opinion.

"If you tell your friends what you're doing and what's going on and they have a weird reaction to it, there's a good chance [it's not a good situation]," he said.

Those who want to get involved in meeting people online should monitor when they disclose personal details like their full name or where they are from and should choose whom they tell carefully, Krylowicz said.

"The more you feel you know somebody, the more you can give out," he said. "But realize there are a lot of different reasons people are online. Know what your motivations are, and what their motivations are, and if it matches up, great."

Skinner also said she suggests being a good judge of character and getting to know people as well as possible before deciding to meet them.

"If you can, find someone online who has met them in person and become friends with them and see how they are in real life," she said. "Ask questions to make sure they're being real. I'm not sure how you can differentiate lies from the truth, but just try to be smart."



"I think online words can have a lot more legs to them," he said. "On IM, words can be interpreted in so many different levels. The more you have cues and other ideas of what's taking place, the less words have to mean. If someone is doing something very nice but says something a little inappropriate, you can take it in context."

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