

# Tips for efficient night shift work in a psychiatric ED

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Attending psychiatrists who work night shift in a psychiatric emergency department (ED) or medical ED require a different set of skills than when working daytime or evening shifts, especially when working full-time or solo. While all patients should be treated carefully and meticulously regardless of the shift, this article offers tips for efficiency for solo attending psychiatrists who work night shift in an ED.

**Check orders.** Typically, multiple psychiatric clinicians are available on other shifts, but only 1 at night. This can lead to significant variability and potential errors in patients' orders. Such errors filter down to night shift and often must be addressed by the solo clinician, who can't say "that person is not my patient" because there are no other clinicians available to help. Carefully check orders (ideally, on all patients every shift) to ensure there are no errors or omissions.

**Use note templates.** While it is important to avoid using mere checklists, with electronic medical record systems, create templates for typical notes. This will save time when the pace of patients increases.

**Be brief in your documentation.** Brevity is key when documenting at night. Focus on what is necessary and sufficient.

**Conduct thorough but efficient interviews.** Be aware of how much time you spend on patient interviews. While still thorough, interviews must often be shorter due to a higher staff-to-patient ratio at night.

**Be aware of potential medical issues.** Many psychiatric EDs are not attached to a hospital. With other medical consultants not readily available in the middle of the night,

be particularly alert for any acute medical issues that may arise, and act accordingly.

**Focus on the order of tasks.** Be aware of which tasks you complete and in what order. For example, at night you may need to medicate sooner for agitation because other patients are sleeping, instead of letting one patient's agitation disrupt the entire night milieu.

**Don't let tasks pile up.** Time management and multitasking are key skills at night. Take care of clinical issues as they arise. Finish documentation as you go along. Don't let things pile up throughout your shift and then spend significant time after your shift to catch up.

**Know your staff.** The staff around you are your eyes and ears. Get to know your clinical and nonclinical staff's tendencies. This can be immensely helpful in picking up any different patterns when interviewing and observing patients.

**Know your limits.** You may not be able to solve everything or obtain the ideal collateral at night. Don't get caught up in definitively trying to resolve things and end up wasting precious time at night. Let it go. Don't overthink. If all else fails, hold the patient overnight.

continued

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**Don't let tasks pile up; finish documentation as you go along**

**Prioritize self-care.** Night shift work has been shown to negatively impact one's health.<sup>1-3</sup> If you choose this type of work, either part-time or full-time, maintain your own health by exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, obtaining adequate rest between shifts, and seeing your health care team often.

## References

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