

# EDUCATING ABOUT “ORDERLY SLEEP” IS AS IMPORTANT AS EDUCATING ABOUT SLEEP DISORDERS

By Brendan Duffy, RST, RPSGT

Who really is their opponent when they claim to be a seriously committed athlete? Is it actually themselves, due to a lack of knowledge about sleep? How do you truly impact a life of an “on the go” financial guru? Do you assume they know about lightboxes and time zone adjustments? Why are we too often silent about the damage being done to our youth due to early start times at schools across the country?

I recently returned from the Board of Registered Polysomnographic Technologists (BRPT) Symposium in Atlanta where I presented the need to spend as much time working with athletes (and everyday corporate employees too) about what I call “orderly sleep”, as we do discussing “sleep disorders.” As sleep educators, we too often focus on continuous positive airway pressure therapy (CPAP) compliance and usage, insomnia, and other sleep disorders, while we miss the low hanging fruit which is discussing, coaching, and educating patients and clients about basic sleep hygiene. This important education is sorely lacking in schools, job sites, and even in many hospitals.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) cited a major problem with the currently available commercial sleep coaches as being ill prepared in many instances. Many of these so called coaches obtain credentials by sending a check to an online company and passing online courses. They then hand out business cards that state they are sleep coaches. As a matter of fact, the AAP in 2015 stated that over half of these coaches (54 percent) had neither the proper education nor healthcare experience. Additionally, 44 percent did not report any secondary education. Yet they prosper because of the many people requesting help versus the few truly qualified and certified educators that are available. We need to look in the mirror and realize we have not done a good job of creating sleep hygiene awareness. We are the true professionals that can differentiate when we can help, and when we need to refer the patient to see a sleep specialist MD. All the lavender oil and tart cherry juice in the world will not help a patient with periodic limb movements of sleep

(PLMS), and many of these high priced online certified coaches probably don’t know what PLMS even is!

As a registered sleep technologist and a sleep educator, have you ever gone to your local fitness center or gym and asked about initiating a sleep program? Have you gone to a local trucking company and asked if they need assistance to review their shift schedules? Do you think they might listen if they could save money on injuries, errors, and accidents? Have you ever thought about producing sleep hygiene videos for local corporate customers to share with their employees? Have you offered to write articles about sleep issues for your local community or church newsletters?

We have to explain to our community members that it is neither “macho” nor healthy to “work until you drop”. We have to counsel bankers and investment staff that do not know how to properly prepare for long overseas trips and the time zone changes they must overcome. We have to help them prepare days in advance so they are on top of their game when they arrive at their destination.

We need to coach high school and college athletes that they run the risk of a concussion, or a subsequent concussion if they are sleep deprived. For instance, we need to make young basketball athletes understand that their cell phone use at night can do more to sabotage their game performance than many of their opponents. We need to explain to coaches about teenage circadian rhythms. Sleep deprivation can cause a mental state that causes turnovers, inability to react to opportunities, and causes the same results as any hulking opponent that rejects your easy layups!

We need to work with local schools to help parents and children find more time for sleep in their daily lives. It has been stated by others that in life we are bound to live in pain...the pain of discipline or the pain of failing to adhere to this discipline and thus not becoming as good as we can be. We have choices to make and one of them that often is misplayed is not taking your sleep as seriously as you do your diet, exercise, and playbook preparations.

As sleep educators, I ask you to start thinking outside the box. I ask you to look around for opportunities OUTSIDE the sleep lab. Work with athletes, work with companies, write articles and blogs, and help your local public service employees develop a healthy shiftwork lifestyle. Because in the end, the community members with “disorderly sleep” can become as impaired, injured, and unhealthy as the patients you routinely assist that have “sleep disorders”!

Sleep Well. Compete Better! ❖



## BRENDAN DUFFY, RST, RPSGT

Brendan Duffy, RST, RPSGT is the Coordinator/Manager of a six bed AASM accredited sleep disorders center at St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, N.Y. With almost 20 years of sleep medicine experience, he enjoys speaking and writing on various sleep topics especially sleep as it relates to athletic competition and performance.