A narrative review of interventions for improving sleep and reducing circadian disruption in medical inpatients

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Abstract

Sleep and circadian rhythm disruption are frequently observed in patients across hospital departments. This is alarming since impaired nocturnal sleep and disruption to a normal circadian rhythm can compromise health and disturb processes involved in recovery from illness (eg, immune functions). With this in mind, the present narrative review discusses how patient characteristics (sleep disorders, anxiety and stress, chronotype and disease), hospital routines (pain management, timing of medication, nocturnal vital sign monitoring and physical inactivity), and hospital environment (light, noise) may all contribute to sleep and circadian rhythm disruption in patients. We also propose hospital-based strategies that may help reduce sleep and circadian rhythm disruption in patients admitted to the hospital.
1. Introduction

Poor sleep patterns and circadian rhythm disruption can considerably impact health [1-4]. By utilizing data from more than 1.1 million men and women aged between 30 to 102 years from the Cancer Prevention Study II of the American Cancer Society [1]. It has been shown that short-duration sleepers experienced increased mortality hazard (15% for those reporting less than 3.5 or 4.5 hours), compared with those reporting seven hours sleep per night [1]. In a separate study involving 185 healthy older adults (primarily aged between 60s - 80s) sleep efficiency less than 80% (ie, less than 80 % off the time in bed asleep) was associated with a ~2-fold greater risk for death [2]. Finally, in a cohort of 28,731 female nurses (aged ≥ 44 years), night shift work (known to cause chronic circadian disruption) increased all-cause mortality (HR: 1.26) [5]. Collectively, it is unsurprising that proper sleep (for a description of sleep stages and sleep architecture, see Figure 1) and maintenance of a robust circadian rhythm are widely seen as essential for a long healthy lifespan.

Although hospitalized patients represent a very heterogeneous population, in general they frequently suffer from sleep and circadian rhythm disruption. For example, 93 middle-aged general internal medicine inpatients (aged: 60.6±20.3 years) self-reported about 1.5 hours shorter nocturnal sleep duration in hospital than at home, accompanied with poorer subjective sleep quality [6]. The use of hypnotics to facilitate sleep is much more prevalent among inpatients (>25%), compared to the general population (3%). Of note, many patients do not suffer from sleep problems prior to hospital admission [7,8]. Moreover, 24-hour constant bright light exposure, as is often found in many hospital departments (eg, at intensive care units, ICUs), may considerably disrupt patients’ normal circadian rhythm, as it suppresses the production of the pineal gland hormone melatonin [9]. Melatonin advances the circadian timing of sleep, but also plays an important role for immunity and recovery. Disruptions to the sleep-wake cycle in hospitalized patients are of considerable concern, as they may alter diagnostic characteristics (eg, increased odds of having hyperglycemia during morning’s
blood testing), increase the risk of post-surgery complications, lower pain threshold, prolong the length of hospital stay, and reduce graft survival [10-15]. Therefore, improving sleep and reducing circadian rhythm disruption in hospitalized patients needs to become an important priority. With this in mind, the present narrative review discusses how patient characteristics, hospital routines, and hospital environment may all contribute to sleep and circadian rhythm disruption in patients. We also propose hospital-based strategies that may help reduce sleep and circadian rhythm disruption in patients admitted to the hospital.

2. Patient characteristics

2.1. Insomnia

Insomnia is defined as persistent difficulty with sleep initiation, duration, consolidation, or quality that occurs despite adequate opportunity and circumstances for sleep, and results in daytime impairment [16]. The symptoms of insomnia can be assessed using the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI) [17]. Primary chronic insomnia is prevalent among 6-11% of the general population [18, 19]. In addition to the pre-existing chronic insomnia, during hospital stay, new onset insomnia in the form of adjustment insomnia is common. Typical triggers for transient adjustment insomnia are stress, significant life changes, and external environmental causes (eg, noise). In this way, new onset transient insomnia at hospital can be regarded as a normal response. Accordingly, in a group of 205 general inpatients, 36% had newly onset of insomnia during hospitalization [20]. Consequently, hypnotics including benzodiazepine receptor agonists (Z drugs) and benzodiazepines are frequently used by hospital staff to alleviate insomnia symptoms among inpatients. A retrospective study found that 26% of hospital patients (n=642) were treated with hypnotics, most frequently trazodone (30%), lorazepam (24%) and zolpidem tartrate (18%) [7]. A separate study found that 29% of the patients without pre-admission hypnotic use (n=100) received sleep medication during admission, of which the majority were zopiclone and benzodiazepines [21].
Though Z drugs and benzodiazepines are beneficial in curtailing sleep onset latency and possibly promoting melatonin secretion [22], some (e.g., estazolam, temazepam) have been shown to reduce slow-wave sleep [23]. This sleep stage plays an important role for immune functions, maintenance of brain health, and energy metabolism [24-26]. In addition to their effects on sleep, Z drugs and benzodiazepines exert various adverse effects, including drowsiness, cognitive impairment, and increased risk of delirium [27, 28]. Among patients with impaired glucose metabolism (e.g., type 2 diabetes mellitus), administration of Z drugs and benzodiazepines may further disrupt the glycemic control [29]. Moreover, the prevalence of inappropriate use of hypnotics among inpatients is alarmingly high. For example, a recent investigation involving 1,308 elderly patients showed that 15.9% received potentially inappropriate prescription of benzodiazepines or zopiclone to treat sleep problems [30].

Further arguing against the widespread hypnotic use in hospital, a systematic review did not find sufficient evidence that pharmacotherapy (including benzodiazepines, nonbenzodiazepine sedatives, melatonin, propofol, and dexmedetomidine) improves the quality or quantity of sleep in hospitalized patients with sleep complaints [31].

Another problem of hypnotic use, especially concerning benzodiazepines and Z drugs, is that patients may suffer from rebound insomnia as well as rebound anxiety after being discharged from the hospital; and no longer having access to sleep medication [32, 33]. The use of sleep aids that are less addictive or habit-forming may help avoid such adverse effects. Suvorexant, which antagonizes signaling of the wake-promoting hypothalamic neuropeptide orexin, has been shown to be effective at decreasing sleep onset latency and increasing total sleep time in patients with insomnia [34,35]. Discontinuation after a one year administration of suvorexant (40 mg/day, aged <65 years; 30 mg/day, aged ≥65 years, n=522) showed no significant withdrawal effect; however rebound insomnia was detected compared to the placebo group (n=259) [35]. Ramelteon is a selective melatonin receptor agonist which shortens sleep onset latency in adults with symptoms of insomnia. Following the
discontinuation of a six month ramelteon administration (8 mg/night, 30 min before bedtime), patients with chronic insomnia (n = 227) showed no withdrawal symptoms or rebound insomnia [36]. Nevertheless, ramelteon does not improve difficulties in sleep maintenance (ie, the most common symptom of insomnia) [37]. Moreover, suvorexant and ramelteon still have side effects similar to other sleep agents, with daytime somnolence being the most common. Hence, whenever hypnotics are prescribed for inpatients, relevant guidelines regarding symptom evaluation and choice of medication must be strictly followed [38, 39].

Cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I), consisting of repeated therapeutic sessions, is recognized as the first-line treatment for chronic insomnia [39]. Furthermore, even a single 1-hour session of CBT-I (n=20) showed sufficient efficacy for alleviating acute insomnia, with a lower ISI score compared to non-intervention controls (n=20) at one month follow-up (Cohen’s d = 0.64) [40]. This suggests that CBT-I may be introduced in hospital settings to ease adjustment insomnia among inpatients. The treatment effects of CBT-I have also been studied among patients with severe diseases. A study in 111 cancer patients showed that a two month CBT-I induced a rapid and durable mitigation of insomnia severity (Cohen’s d = 2.59, ISI score at two month compared to baseline; 2.41, five month compared to baseline) [41]. A meta-analysis of comorbid insomnia with various medical and psychological diseases (including chronic pain, cancer, and coronary artery disease) showed that CBT-I significantly improved sleep quality measured by ISI (weighted mean difference (WMD) vs. comparators eg, non-intervention or sleep hygiene education: - 6.36, SE: 1.27, n=566), sleep diary based sleep onset latency (WMD vs. comparators: -20.68 min, SE: 3.27, n=824), and wake after sleep onset (WMD vs. comparators: -20.79 min, SE:3.60, n=733) [42]. However, despite the promising effects of CBT-I on insomnia in outpatient populations, to date there is no trial regarding the effect of CBT-I on inpatients. Finally, training to improve understanding of normal sleep, sleep pathology, and the factors that can precipitate sleep disturbance could
provide a context for clinical staff to interpret sleep complaints in their patients, evaluate responses to sleep-promoting interventions, and guide decision making regarding referrals.

2.2. Obstructive sleep apnea

Sleep-disordered breathing (SDB), which is in most cases obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), considerably influences patients’ disease progression and recovery. OSA is hallmarked by full or partial cessation of breathing (namely apnea and hypopnea) during sleep due to the collapse of upper airway structures. The severity of OSA is classified by the apnea-hypopnea index (AHI) as mild: \(5 \leq \text{AHI} < 15\) per hour, moderate: \(15 \leq \text{AHI} < 30\) per hour and severe: \(\text{AHI} \geq 30\) per hour.

Apneas or hypopneas lead to decreased oxygen saturation, elevated blood pressure, and fragmented or light sleep [43]. OSA and other SDB disorders affect 10-17% of men and 3-9% of women, of whom the majority are undiagnosed and untreated [44, 45]. In a study involving 2,877 surgical patients, 81% of the 661 patients screened high-risk for OSA had not been diagnosed before [45]. Several populations have a significantly higher prevalence of OSA, including individuals with obesity (up to 55%) [44], type 2 diabetes (50-90%) [29], and cardiovascular diseases (>50%) [46]. In hospitalized patients, OSA has been associated with an increased risk for cardiopulmonary complications, unplanned reintubations, and postoperative myocardial infarction [47]. Moreover, a study involving 1,022 patients found that those with OSA (68% of the population) had a doubled risk of stroke or death, independent of other risk factors [48].

Early screening and treatment of OSA are important among inpatients, and standard diagnostic guideline is available [49]. Polysomnography (PSG) is the gold standard method for diagnosing OSA. However, this technique is rarely available in general clinical settings. Alternatively, several questionnaire-based screening tools are available, such as the STOP BANG questionnaire [50] and the Score for Preoperative Prediction of OSA for the surgical
ward [51]. However, the sole use of questionnaires for screening OSA is not recommended in clinical practice due to their variations in accuracy and specificity across different patient populations [52-54]. Continuous pulse oximetry can help to confirm the presence of OSA (through dipping in oxygen saturation) [55, 56]. Conversely, studies in children referred to a pediatric respiratory clinic have revealed a considerable night-to-night variability in overnight oximetry [57], suggesting that while a positive result of pulse oximetry from one night can be used to make a diagnosis of OSA, a negative result cannot rule it out. Therefore, repeating the overnight oximetry may give more confidence in negative result. An alternative approach for objective assessment of OSA is cardiorespiratory polygraph recording. This method uses nasal/oronasal airflow, chest wall and abdominal movements, and oxygen saturation. Recent data obtained from 27 boys and 23 girls, with a mean age of 5.3 ± 2.5 years, suggest that cardiorespiratory polygraphy achieves adequate sensitivity (90.9%) and specificity (94.1%) for diagnosis of OSA, although it may fail to accurately recognize milder forms of the condition [58].

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy is the first-line treatment for OSA and is applicable in hospital setting [59]. The adherence to CPAP treatment among inpatients diagnosed with moderate to severe OSA is of great clinical importance. Among 1,973 inpatients with high OSA risk (defined as two or more yes responses to the four questions of the STOP questionnaire), being compliant to the positive airway pressure treatment (≥ 4 hours/night) led to a lowering of rapid response system events rate, compared to patients with low treatment compliance or non-treatment (16.99 vs. 53.40 vs. 56.21/1,000 admissions) [60]. Rapid response systems are commonly used safety protocols in hospitals throughout the United States to identify and quickly intervene to reverse serious and potentially fatal deterioration of patients in the general hospital population [61]. Another study among 345 inpatients revealed that adherence to CPAP (≥ 4 hours/night, ≥70% nights of a 30-day period) is associated with lower all-cause and cardiovascular-cause hospital readmissions
(ORs of non-adherent group: 3.52 and 2.31, respectively) [62]. A meta-analysis including 904 surgery patients with OSA showed that perioperative CPAP use is linked to a slightly shorter length of stay, compared to patients without CPAP treatment (4.0 ± 4 vs. 4.4 ± 8 days) [63]. Collectively, while these studies link CPAP adherence with improved clinical outcomes, another possible interpretation of these data could be that patients who are adherent to CPAP tend to be those who exhibit greater self-efficacy generally, and that it is the latter trait that mediates improved clinical outcomes, not CPAP per se.

In case of milder forms of OSA (ie, AHI<15), avoidance of supine posture (in which the airway is more likely to be obstructed among OSA patients) in sleep could help reduce the occurrence of apneas. This could be achieved by using the sleep position trainer, where a small vibration is generated whenever the patient is in the supine position [64].

2.3. Anxiety and stress
Hospitalization may cause anxiety and stress. Thus, transient (new onset) insomnia may be regarded as a normal response to anxiety in mentally healthy people. A meta-analysis of 2,880 ICU survivors found that anxiety symptoms were present in one-third of the patients [65]. According to another study involving 166 normal ward patients (aged ≥ 50 years), 18% perceived anxiety as a disruptor to their sleep [66]. Stress and anxiety result in sympathetic activation, increasing the risk of light and fragmented sleep [67]. Various factors, including an unfamiliar environment, lack of control, uncertainty, and worries about disease progression could trigger stress and anxiety during hospital stay [68]. The Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale is an easy and clinically effective screening tool for the assessment of psychological well-being among inpatients [69].

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has proven useful in treating anxiety. In a study in 40 patients with terminal cancer providing brief CBT tailored to the concerns of patients with terminal cancer (targeting skills for relaxation, coping with cancer worries, and activity
pacing) led to significant improvements in anxiety [70]. As CBT is becoming better available via digital sources as a self-assistant tool [71], clinical trials in hospital patient groups are needed to examine the effect size of self-applied CBT to ease anxiety and promote sleep. Other low-key changes may also be favorable to lower anxiety during hospitalization. A study indicated that transparency of treatment and caretaking, feeling in control, being involved in decision making, and preserving integrity could decrease feelings of worry and improve sleep among inpatients [67]. But even simple nursing methods such as communicate information to patients and families, ask for and offer assistance, and being respectful and responsive to patient preferences could be hypothesized to further help reduce patients’ anxiety and thereby improve their sleep.

### 2.4. Chronotype

A study in 117 general ward patients (mean age 48 years) hospitalized for >72 hours showed that 56% reported earlier in bed and wake times as a disruptor of their sleep [72]. The chronotype of a patient can help to predict the resilience to the dictated early sleep-wake schedule in the hospital. Whereas larks (ie, early chronotype) are most alert earlier in the day and will be less affected by the early-timed routines, night-owls (ie, late chronotype) are most alert later during the day. Thus, it could be hypothesized that the greater the mismatch between circadian preference and hospital schedules, the higher the risk of impaired sleep and circadian disruption.

In addition, the night-time activity of night owls could disturb sleep onset of larks in shared patient rooms. The most apparent solution would be to cluster patients with a similar chronotype into the same patient room, to avoid evening/morning disturbances, and to allow later-timed controls or treatments in the night owl chronotype. Treating late chronotype patients with a 30-minute morning bright light exposure followed by afternoon melatonin administration could represent an additional solution for advancing the sleep-wake rhythm of late chronotypes [73].
As discussed in the “Hospital Environment” section, patients, especially those who are bed-bound, are often exposed to unnatural light conditions when admitted to the hospital (e.g., constant bright light; less pronounced differences in indoor light characteristics between the day and night). Daily changes in light intensity function as a timing cue to adjust circadian phases [4]. Therefore, unnatural light conditions in the hospital may further exacerbate circadian disruption in patients.

2.5. Disease-related melatonin deficiency

Decreases in melatonin occur in many diseases regarding neurological and metabolic conditions, such as migraine and other forms of severe pain, type 2 diabetes and insulin resistance, as well as certain types of cancer [74]. Decreased levels of melatonin have also been described in neurodegenerative disorders, especially in Alzheimer's disease [75, 76]. Reduced transparency of the lens for blue light (e.g., due to yellowing of the lens or cataract) may be other factors resulting in lower amplitude of melatonin rhythms, especially in older patients [77, 78]. Oral administration of melatonin in the evening to restore the normal endogenous day/night rhythm of melatonin may be a strategy to overcome diseases-related melatonin deficiency. Additionally, increased light exposure during the day, especially in the morning after awakening, may further strengthen inpatients’ circadian health.

3. Hospital Routines

3.1. Pain relief and timing of medication

Patients’ sleep quality might deteriorate due to illness symptoms like pain, shortness of breath, nocturia, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or itching. Pain and sleep interact in a bidirectional manner [79], and could therewith cause a vicious cycle. Additionally, the side effects of medication following intake of beta-blockers or opioids may also impede patients’ sleep [80, 81]. Chronotherapy, referring to the appropriate timing of medication to relieve
illness symptoms at times when they are most disruptive (eg, by targeting pain during nocturnal sleep) should be considered [12]. Conversely, drugs that interfere with sleep should be either avoided or administered at reasonable times (eg, diuretics in the morning to prevent nocturia). Evidence suggests an inhibitory effect of beta-blockers on melatonin release in humans [82], and counter-acting this effect by evening melatonin administration improved sleep in patients taking atenolol or metoprolol [83]. Together with the well-known sleep-inducing effects of melatonin; it also contains analgesic properties and exogenous melatonin has been successfully used for these purposes in conditions such as fibromyalgia, migraine as well as during surgical operations [84].

However, controlled trials in hospitalized patients are needed to confirm these findings. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) are also known to disrupt sleep by increasing the number of awakenings and decreasing sleep efficiency, possibly due to suppression of melatonin [85, 86]. It could be suggested that NSAID usage during daytime, and melatonin supplementation during the evening could result in pain relief while simultaneously preserving sleep depending on the patient’s disease and pain condition.

3.2. Vital sign monitoring

Vital sign monitoring is an essential part of hospital routines. Yet, nocturnal measurements (normally repeated 2-3 times overnight) could impair inpatients’ sleep quality. A study in 166 inpatients found that 34% reported nocturnal monitoring procedure as a major sleep disrupter [66]. Another study (n=54,096) identified that patients who had significantly fewer adverse events (evaluated by the Modified Early Warning Score) had overnight vital signs taken at a similar rate as high-risk patients, which suggested the institutions to properly reduce the nocturnal vital sign monitoring for low-risk medical inpatients [87]. Moreover, in support of this an intervention introducing an 8-hour (10pm-6am) avoidance of waking for routine vital signs and medications demonstrated that the proportion of patients (n=106) who
received as-needed sedatives dropped from 32% to 16% [88]. Currently, it is challenging to determine to what extent the frequency of nocturnal vital sign collection could be reduced without affecting inpatients’ safety, and limited efforts have been made to address the issue. Another approach is to introduce non-invasive vital sign monitoring to replace the traditional measurements. These devices are often available to measure vital signs (e.g., heart rate, body temperature, and blood pressure) continuously, which allow an overnight distance monitoring. Some portable, continuous vital sign monitoring system have been piloted in the clinical setting and might be promising for guarding sleep while safeguarding early recognition of possible deterioration [89].

3.3. Bed rest and physical activity

Daytime physical activity improves nighttime sleep [90] and supports the maintenance of a healthy circadian rhythm [91]. Conversely, good sleep has been associated with increased engagement in physical activity [92]. Therefore, reduced physical activity due to limited opportunities to engage in exercise or outdoor activities might result in impaired sleep and circadian disruption during hospitalization, which in turn may decrease daytime physical activity due to a lack of motivation. Multiple ways exist to break this vicious cycle, such as encouraging patients to take a walk outside, serving meals in a separate room, or offering bed exercises, all of which are likely to aid sleep and support the maintenance of a normal circadian rhythm. Additionally, such interventions increase exposure to natural light with additional direct positive effects on sleep and circadian rhythm [15].

Another common behavior among inpatients is napping. A daytime nap may compensate in part for less sleep at night, and promote recovery from acute illness. However, possible obstacles to the practice of napping exist (reviewed in [93]). For example, a long daytime nap can interfere with the following night’s (main) sleep. Excessive napping might be a marker of other pathology, including undiagnosed sleep disorders, such as OSA (see section “Patient
characteristics”). Therefore, naps should be purposeful and clinicians should encourage patient vigilance and activity outside of these times; otherwise patients may drift in and out of sleep all day and night.

4. Hospital Environment

4.1. Noise

Typical hospital noise, such as talking, alarms, phones, and outside traffic triggers arousal and increases heart rate during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep in healthy adults [94]. Furthermore, noise can attenuate the magnitude of overnight melatonin release in healthy humans [95]. Thus, it could be speculated that noise in the hospital may lead to the development of sleep disturbances and circadian disruption in patients. Supporting this hypothesis, two studies in the general medicine and oncology wards (n=92 and 166, respectively) found that 27-43% of patients identified noise as a major cause of poor sleep condition [66, 96]. Acoustic measurements further revealed that the average noise level in the patient rooms was roughly 38 decibels between 11pm and 7am, with a mean peak noise level of about 70 decibels [96]. The latter is comparable to noise levels of a vacuum cleaner. In a separate hospital study, nocturnal noise levels were between 35 and 55 decibels in patient rooms [97]. Even more harmful sound conditions were found in the ICU, where the average 24-hr noise level was over 45 decibels, with a peak noise over 85 decibel occurring 4-16 times per hour between 10pm and 5am [98]. To avoid possible negative effects on sleep, the sound pressure level should not exceed 30 decibels (max peak noise: 45 decibels), according to recommendations of the World Health Organization.

Using polysomnography, it has been shown that in healthy adults wearing earplugs ameliorated the noise effect on sleep under a four night mock ICU environment. Subjects (n=10) fell asleep 24 minutes faster and the number of awakenings was reduced by 30% under this intervention, compared with counterparts receiving no soundproofing equipment.
Another intervention arm (n=10) in the same study with 1-mg melatonin administration at 21:00 led to even better sleep quality [95]. Strategies such as limiting the volume of alarms of medical devices to \( \leq 40 \) decibel, using white noise [99], and changing patient room acoustics may further support inpatients’ sleep [100]. However, further high-quality research is needed to strengthen the evidence base [101].

**4.2. Light**

Bright, preferably short wavelength light (ie, blue-enriched light) during morning hours supports the maintenance of a stable sleep-wake pattern and has been linked to increased nocturnal sleep quality [15, 102]. Conversely, artificial blue-enriched light during evening hours delays the production of melatonin and impairs sleep quality [103]. Therefore, it is not surprising that unnatural light characteristics often found in the hospital may contribute to impaired sleep and circadian disruption. Advocating this hypothesis, a study involving 40 acute care inpatients (length of stay \( \geq 72 \) hours) observed that the mean luminance in the patient room was about 100 lux between 6am and 10pm, opposed to luminance typically found in normal living environments (office: 500 lux) [104]. The sleep duration of these inpatients was less than four hours per day [104]. In addition to dim-light conditions during daytime, medical inpatients are quite often subjected to increased amounts of evening and night light. For example, the maximal nocturnal luminance in ICU can reach as high as 1000-3000 lux [105]. This could explain why ICU patients lack the typical nocturnal peak of melatonin secretion and show a delayed circadian rhythm [106,107].

Either mimicking 24-hour natural light variations in patient rooms, or exposing patients to natural light conditions during morning hours may aid their sleep and help maintain a healthy circadian rhythm. A recent study investigated the effects of a dynamic lighting system on sleep among 196 cardiology ward patients. The system mimicked a natural light pattern, generating 300 lux, 4000K light between 8am-6pm, together with an enhanced luminance
(blue-enriched light of 1750 lux, 6500K) between 10:30am-12:30pm and a reduced luminance (100 lux, 3000K) between 1:00pm and 2:00pm. During evening hours, reading lights with adjustable luminance (max 300 lux) were used by patients to restrict the light exposure when room light was dimmed. Patients of the intervention group slept around 30 minutes longer compared to patients under conventional light conditions [108]. A different study implementing enhanced light exposure during morning hours (from 9:00am to noon) in ICU patients (n=11) found that the bright light exposure resulted in improved circadian synchronization and earlier timed rhythms [107]. In summary, construction measures and smart applications of ambient light could considerably aid sleep and strengthen circadian rhythm in medical inpatients.

Another condition frequently found in the hospital is that natural light is not evenly distributed within and between patient rooms. This may hamper the ability of patients laying further from the window to be in sync with the natural light/dark cycle, with possibly undesirable implications for sleep and health. A study involving 99 inpatients those whose beds were located closer to the window (distance <1 m) in the patients’ room slept better, compared to those laying further from the window (distance >3 m; 7.3±1.8 vs. 5.8±2.4, 1-10 scale) [109]. Moreover, a study involving 1,057 patients from internal, otolaryngology, surgery, and gynecology wards pointed to a role of natural daylight exposure on patients' length of stay. Patients located in southwest facing rooms (200-300 lux; mean 220 lux between 8am-6pm) had a 29% shorter average length of stay, compared to patients in the northwest facing rooms (70-230 lux; mean 101 lux) [110]. Furthermore, sunnier compared to darker hospital rooms were associated with shorter length of stay and lower mortality in patients with myocardial infarction (n=628) [111]. These studies implicate that circadian disruption due to weak light exposure may adversely affect patients’ health and recovery.

5. Conclusions
Sleep disturbances and a disrupted circadian rhythm are prevalent problems among patients across hospital departments. Multiple causes exist (summarized in Table 1), including but not restricted to constant bright light conditions, low 24-hour light amplitudes, noise due to staff activities or medical devices, hospital routines such as nocturnal vital sign monitoring, reduced physical activity, anxiety related to hospitalization, existence of specific sleep disorders, and a mismatch between a patient’s chronotype and timing of the hospital schedule. At first glance, the complexity of factors contributing to sleep problems and circadian disruption might discourage hospital staff to tackle this problem. Moreover, there is limited evidence from randomized clinical trials testing to what extent strategies targeting these factors may improve sleep and stabilize circadian rhythm in patients of various wards and age. Conversely, any effort is likely to pay off as sleep and factors under circadian control (eg, melatonin, support immunity, reduce pain sensitivity) lower the risk of post-surgery side effects, and decrease the risk of delirium [112-116].

Contributors
X.T., L.v.E., M.P., T.L., and C.B. did the literature search; X.T. and C.B. drafted the figure; X.T., L.v.E., M.P., T.L., and C.B. discussed and wrote the review. All authors equally contributed to this manuscript.

Declaration of interests
M.P. reports other from Bioprojet, other from Jazz Pharmaceuticals, personal fees from UCB-Pharma, personal fees from GSK, personal fees from Takeda, personal fees from MSD, other from Idorsia, other from Avadel, personal fees from Pfizer, other from Umecrine, outside the submitted work. The other authors have nothing to disclose and no conflicts of interest to report. The authors are unaware of any affiliation, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review article.
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Figure 1: Normal sleep architecture. Sleep in humans consists of four distinct stages: sleep stage N1, N2, slow-wave sleep (SWS; also known as N3), and rapid-eye movement (REM) sleep. Nocturnal sleep consists of 4-6 sleep cycles. In the first hours after sleep onset, SWS typically predominates, whereas REM sleep is more prevalent in later parts of sleep.
Table 1: Possible interventions to aid sleep and strengthen circadian rhythm in medical inpatients. Abbreviations: AD, Alzheimer’s disease; OSA, Obstructive sleep apnea; CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy; CPAP, continuous positive airway pressure therapy; AHI, apnea-hypopnea index; ICU, intensive care unit.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Patient characteristics</th>
<th>Sleep/Circadian rhythm disruptor(s)</th>
<th>Main characteristic(s)</th>
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|                         | Insomnia                           | At least one of the following symptoms: difficulty initiating sleep, difficulty maintaining sleep, and/or early morning awakenings | CBT for insomnia (CBT-I), single session for acute cases  
Hypnotics (must strictly follow the treatment guidance to reduce inappropriate use)                                                                                                                                          |
|                         |                                     | Due to stress, anxiety, and disease-related worries when admitted to the hospital      |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                         | OSA                                 | Recurrent episodes of full or partial cessation of breathing during sleep                | Initiation of CPAP for AHI $\geq 15$  
Patient should avoid supine position to improve airflow when asleep                                                                                                                                         |
|                         |                                     | The severity of OSA is classified by the AHI                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                         |                                     | Sleepiness and frequent napping during the day                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                         | Anxiety and stress                  | Particularly common in psychiatry ward, ICU, and surgery ward                         | CBT  
Transparency of treatment and caretaking  
Communicate information to patients and families                                                                                                                                                          |
|                         |                                     | Can cause adjustment insomnia                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                         | Chronotype                          | Mismatch between individual’s circadian preference and hospital schedules can interfere with patients’ habitual sleep/wake patterns | Bright light exposure during morning hours + reduced light exposure in the evening $\Rightarrow$ advances the sleep-wake rhythm of late chronotypes  
Grouping of patients with a similar chronotype (larks, owls)                                                                                                                                           |
|                         |                                     | Inter-individual differences in circadian preferences can cause sleep problems among patients sharing the same patient room |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                         | Melatonin deficiency                | Prevalent among older patients and certain neurological disorders (eg, AD)             | Administration of melatonin in the evening to restore the normal endogenous day/night rhythm of melatonin  
Increased light exposure during the day, especially in the morning after awakening                                                                                                                             |
|                         |                                     | Causes circadian disruption                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| **Hospital routine** | **Pain and timing of medication** | Poor sleep quality can be caused by acute (e.g., after surgery) and chronic pain (e.g., fibromyalgia)  
Medicine taken prior to nocturnal sleep can alter melatonin production and impair sleep (e.g., nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs; diuretics) | Sleep-oriented pain relief  
Appropriate timing of medication to reduce side effects on sleep and melatonin  
Oral supplementation of melatonin in the evening |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Nocturnal vital sign monitoring** | Disrupts sleep of inpatient and fellow roommates. | Use distance technologies for patient monitoring  
Reduce frequency of vital sign check-ups in patients at sufficiently low risk of clinical deterioration |
| **Physical inactivity** | Low engagement in physical activity can impair sleep and cause circadian disruption (e.g., due to reduced light exposure) | Encourage mild-level physical activity in patients  
Encourage outdoor activities  
Dining areas to engage patients in physical activity |
| **Hospital Environment** | **Noise** | Night-time noise levels can reach up to 70 decibels in general wards  
Even higher noise levels are found in ICU  
A noise level below 30-45 decibels is required to facilitate a good sleep environment | Access to earplugs  
Limit the volume of alarms of medical devices to ≤ 40 decibel  
Use white noise to mask background sounds  
Oral supplementation of melatonin in the evening  
Architectural arrangements to improve sound prevention |
| **Light** | Low-luminance light exposure during morning hours and/or excessive evening light exposure can delay melatonin phase  
Evening light stimulus increases alertness  
Less pronounced differences in indoor light characteristics between the day and night can flatten the 24-hour amplitude of pathways under circadian control | Access to sleep mask  
Bright light exposure during morning hours  
Reduced light exposure in the evening  
Architectural arrangements, such as larger window in patient room  
Smart light bulb systems in patient rooms to mimic natural light variations |
Normal sleep architecture

- A sleep cycle (~90-120 mins)
- Stage N3 (slow-wave sleep, predominant in the first-half of sleep)
- REM sleep (predominant in the second-half of sleep)

Sleep stages:
- REM
- N1
- N2
- N3

Sleep duration (hours)
Highlights

• Hospitalized patients often experience sleep-wake cycle disruptions.
• Proper sleep and a healthy circadian rhythm support recovery.
• Therefore, action is needed to avoid sleep-wake cycle disruptions among inpatients.
• This review discusses strategies to stabilize inpatients’ sleep-wake cycle.