**UNIT MANAGERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE AMONG NURSES AT PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN THE EASTERN CAPE**

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**ABSTRACT**

Caring has been described in literature as encompassing empathy, attentiveness, experience, and sensitivity, which is then translated into nursing bedside practice. However, the cost of caring may cause nurses to become withdrawn and unable to care for their patients. This phenomenon is called compassion fatigue (CF), where nurses feel unable to respond to their patients and become withdrawn from stressful scenarios in the unit. CF is prevalent globally among nurses based in all hospital disciplines.

The aim of the study was to explore the perceptions of unit manager’s (UMs) on CF among nurses in private hospitals in the Eastern Cape in order to develop recommendations for UMs to manage CF among nursing staff. The study used a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive approach. Williams, McDowell and Kautz’s (2011) Caring Leadership Model was used to explore the UMs’ perceptions of CF.

The population was UMs in private hospitals in the Eastern Cape. Twelve UMs were purposively sampled, and semi-structured individual interviews conducted. Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant institutions and the ethical principles of justice, beneficence and respect were upheld throughout the study. Five themes were constructed: manifestations of CF among nursing staff; contributors to CF among nursing staff; patient outcomes hindered by CF among nursing staff; enhancing the well-being of nursing staff; and UM self-awareness and improved support. Recommendations were developed regarding the facilitation of UM peer support of CF management; the training of UMs regarding CF and related conditions; and the assistance of UMs to support staff exhibiting CF symptoms. **[248 words]**