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The impact of caring for terminally ill patients on caregivers at Sparrow Ministries Hospice in relation to compassion satisfaction, secondary traumatic stress and burnout

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ABSTRACT

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa has become a health care challenge with the high rate of people living with the illness and needing hospice care (Zimmerman, 2001). According to Munley (2006), palliative care is mostly provided by Non Profit Organisations (NPOs) who rely mostly on funding from private organisations and donations. Caregivers working under NPOS are usually faced with challenges such as lack of resources which might lead to them experiencing compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress and burnout. The primary aim of the study was to measure the levels of compassion satisfaction, secondary traumatic stress and burnout experienced by caregivers caring for terminally ill patients and HIV/AIDS patients at Sparrow Ministries Hospice. The sample comprised 15 caregivers employed at Sparrow Ministries Hospice who have been employed at the organisation for more than six months. The study combined both quantitative and qualitative research designs referred to as mixed methods research design. (Cresswell, 2007). A semi-structured interview schedule and the Professional Quality of Life (ProQol) Scale adopted from Hudnall Stamm, (2009) were utilised to collect data. The results were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) and descriptive statistics. The results of the study, both qualitative and quantitative, indicate that more than half of the participants experienced high compassion satisfaction with average to low burnout and secondary traumatic stress.

In conclusion, awareness of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and burnout in caregivers might help the management develop strategies that may prevent caregivers from suffering from these. Caregivers might also need to develop awareness of the impact the work they do caring for terminally ill HIV/AIDS has on both their professional and their personal lives. The realization by caregivers might assist them in not only focusing on issues with organisational structure, but also on better caring for their emotional wellbeing.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, trauma, secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, compassion satisfaction, caregiver, palliative care.