

Abstract

Paediatric palliative care is an area that is still in its infancy, especially in South Africa, in terms of both research and facilities that offer such specialised and specific care. This study sought to examine both the scope of paediatric palliative care; as well as the possible impact that working in paediatric palliative care may have on a group of nursing staff working in the context of HIV/Aids in Gauteng, South Africa.

A self developed, semi-structured interview was used. The sample comprised of seven paediatric palliative nurses working at The Soweto Hospice and Cotlands Baby Sanctuary. The results of this study found that the scope of paediatric palliative care was not clearly defined. As a result, nurses' roles and responsibilities tended to merge with other members of the multidisciplinary team. Furthermore, it was evident that no standardised or specialised training exists. As a result, nurses tended to use their instinctual mothering or parenting experiences. This, along with cultural beliefs, led nurses to employ a protecting role and as such, often resulted in restrictive communication. Together, these issues seemed to result in the blurring of professional boundaries. Nurses experienced both a positive and negative impact from their job. Nurses attempted to cope with the impact through self-care, social support and institutional support. The ways in which nurses dealt with this impact had implications for the individual nurse, their patients and the institution. These results showed the need for more ongoing training and emotional support for paediatric palliative nurses.