



## Tired of caring

Understanding the negative impact of compassion fatigue is key to ensuring the well-being of nurses and delivering quality healthcare.

**Dr Mercia Jane Tellie** is a senior lecturer at UNISA with an interest in HIV/AIDS, TB and wellness.

*Overwhelmed nurses are at risk of compassion fatigue.*



The well-being of nurses is of prime importance in order for them to deliver quality care. Nurses often have to care for large numbers of traumatised, terminally ill patients, and this impacts negatively on their own well-being.

Nurses are overwhelmed with long queues of patients who need care in antiretroviral clinics. Due to the nature of HIV, caring for these patients is very demanding and causes nurses to become physically and emotionally exhausted. This increases their vulnerability to

developing compassion fatigue. A researcher at UNISA has studied the factors that impact negatively on the well-being of nurses who work in antiretroviral clinics and which increase their vulnerability to compassion fatigue.

“Caring for HIV-positive patients comes at a cost, because nurses empathetically respond to the needs of their patients,” says Dr Mercia Jane Tellie. “Empathy is at the core of the nurse-patient relationship, but it also places nurses in harm’s way. This negatively affects their well-being.”

Awareness of nurses’ vulnerability to compassion fatigue is critical. Management should include the topic of compassion fatigue in the orientation programme, and during the recruitment process nurses should be informed of the risk of developing compassion fatigue.

“If compassion fatigue is not identified early and managed properly, nurses will lose their ability to nurture. This damages the nurse-patient relationship and may culminate in nurses leaving the profession.”

