

## Editorial

### When a nurse's energy is running on reserve



With a light in the COVID-19 tunnel coming closer, slowly but surely, we must prepare not only for the new normal in our daily lives but also for the new challenges awaiting the healthcare system.

Healthcare workers are tired and have worked hard to manage the uncertain circumstances and increased workload. The reality of critically ill patients (including those you know and care for such as colleagues, family and friends) whilst we are trying to cope with limited resources in a challenging and unfamiliar working environment, has taken its toll on the health and wellbeing of all.

Nurses are, as the rest of the country, going through a process of evaluating their lives and relooking at all important aspects that might have been neglected during these challenging times. The reality that we spend most of our active hours at work interacting with colleagues and patients and not with those areas of personal life that make us happy, again emphasised the importance of prioritising. The time and energy we put into our careers have a direct impact on our financial position, intellectual stimulation and development and therefore cannot be ignored when seeking a balanced life. It is therefore of the utmost importance that, when assessing your life, the significance of ensuring that you work for a company or organisation that aligns with your values, purpose and dreams, is recognised.

During the COVID-19 pandemic our working environment changed dramatically and the interaction with colleagues and patients while wearing PPE, not only influenced our energy levels but also our happiness at work. Nurses' energy, and that of

other healthcare workers, is running on reserve and it is critical to make changes to survive. Nurse leaders and co-workers are pivotal in creating an environment that inspires, equips and makes people happy. Under normal working conditions, limited time and effort is spent on the physical and mental wellbeing of healthcare workers; during these trying and challenging times very few organisations have the resources to support their staff. Managing compassion fatigue and post-traumatic stress together with exhaustion caused by long working hours, working in unfamiliar areas and being the only support and physical human contact to patients, will have to be part of our post COVID-19 planning and strategy. Compassion fatigue can result in nurses being unable to distinguish between their own emotions and those of their patients and then, due to being emotionally drained, they struggle to provide quality nursing care. Nurses' energy levels are low and nurse leaders must understand the value of interaction with their staff in encouraging them to continue delivering excellent care. The importance of sleep, healthy diet, exercise, and interaction with their loved ones must be encouraged. Long hours and shift work combined with stressful circumstances can lead to poor sleep patterns and extreme fatigue, resulting in an increased risk for injury and deteriorating health of the nurses.

The nurse leaders' role in creating a positive and professional practice environment, decreasing nurses' burnout, and improving the quality of nursing care cannot be ignored. Their role in creating a positive work environment by enhancing the meaningfulness of work, expressing confidence in employees' ability to perform at a high level, and facilitating goal attainment are important and will contribute to the prevention and management of compassion fatigue and burnout.

The one lesson COVID-19 has taught us is that life is short, full of uncertainties and that those dear to us rely on our strengths, our mental and spiritual health, during challenging times. Remember, the only way to prepare for the post COVID-19 normal, is to *commit to a healthy work-life balance*.

2020 is the Year of the Nurse and Midwife – let us celebrate life by revisiting our personal survival techniques and create a life full of happiness for ourselves, our loved ones, and our colleagues.

**Annelie Meiring**