

## **Running on Empty: Diminished Empathetic Reserve in Front-Line Nurses (5)**

*Wellness and Resilience: Applicable to both learners and educators*

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### **Background:**

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global health crisis. Novel and intolerable pressures have been placed upon nurses affecting their capacity to provide care. The aim of this exploratory study was to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nursing care delivery, the empathetic response of nurses to their patients and family members, and the emotional and physical well-being of the nurses.

### **Actions, Methods or Intervention:**

The collaborators developed a template with guiding questions to use in focused nurse interviews. Four front-line nurses, including two BSN nurses and two Nurse Practitioners, were interviewed virtually while in the midst of the pandemic. The collaborators independently listened to the Interview recordings, then met to discuss commonalities of identified themes.

### **Results:**

Themes which emerged from analysis of the nurses' narratives included changes in roles, increased workload, depersonalized and mechanical care delivery, communication challenges with patient and family members, deficits in palliative care education, perceived poor administrative support and physical/emotional exhaustion.

### **Lessons Learned:**

This study demonstrates that front-line nurses have been immensely challenged, both emotionally and physically during the pandemic. It is important for nurses to recognize that utilization of self-care strategies is essential for promoting self-compassion and resilience. It is also imperative that health care systems and nursing leadership understand how the pandemic has affected their nursing staff, so that they can assist staff in recognizing when physical and emotional exhaustion is occurring and assist them with obtaining needed resources.

### **Future Application and Next Steps:**

Clinical leaders and nursing staff have opportunities to engage in supportive endeavors which can restore focus and regain positive perceptions, strengthen coping skills, and deliver palliative care education in response to the ongoing challenges and stressors created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, they can build resilience in front-line nurses, and ultimately impact delivery of compassionate and empathetic care to patients.

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