

## Is Promotion a Vital Issue to Retain the Health Professional? View From the Resigned Health Professionals at Mankweng Academic Hospital, Limpopo, South Africa

Mirza Mohamad Zahir Uddin Bhuiyan

*\*Department of General Surgery, Mankweng Academic Hospital, Faculty of Health science, University of Limpopo, Limpopo, South Africa*

*\*Corresponding author: (Mirza Bhuiyan) bhuiyanmirza@gmail.com*

**ABSTRACT:** Enough health professionals are essential to deliver optimum health care service to the patients in the health institution. Shortages of health professional have serious effect on the organisation and reduce the capacities to provide necessary services in the health-care sector. Main objective of the study is to view the valuable suggestions advocated by the resigned health professionals of Mankweng Academic Hospital for retaining the staff. The study was an observational retrospective descriptive quantitative design associated with all health professionals, who quitted from Mankweng Academic Hospital from January 2018 to December 2022. A total of 139 health professionals resigned. These included medical practitioner, professional nurse, pharmacist, physiotherapists, radiographers, occupational therapists, psychologists. Reason of resignation: Promotion 28%, lack of prospect advancement 17% and relocation to other areas 17% are some of the main reasons for resignation. Suggestions to retain: Increase the number of staff 30%, support the employee 11%, respect the employee 6% and 4% indicated for promotion to retain the staff. Almost 30% of all resigned health professions emphasised to increase the number of staff and only 4% advocated for promotion to retain the health professionals. Increasing the number of health professionals is crucial at present in Mankweng Academic Hospital.

**KEY WORDS:** *Health professional, resignation, retention*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Enough health professionals are essential to deliver optimum health care service to the patients in the health institution. Shortages of health professional and staff turnover have serious effect on the organisation and reduce the capacities to provide necessary services in the health-care sector worldwide [1,2].

Recruitment, retention of the health workforce and increase health financing in developing countries important to achieve the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages [3].

The correlation involving the supervisor and employee is another beneficial aspect to retain the employee. Trustworthy governance is considered a significant element for retaining capable employees [4]. Supervisor and worker engagement reduce staff resignations [5,6].

One of the main purposes of National Health Insurance (NHI) bill of South Africa to achieve universal access to quality health care services in the Republic (NHI bill 2023) which was announced in fifth session, six parliament of the republic of South Africa [7]. In order to improve access to quality, safe and efficacious medical service enough finance and health professionals are required.

Mankweng Hospital is situated in Turfloop/Sovenga, Limpopo Province, South Africa. It is a tertiary academic institution providing training and clinical services to the population of the Limpopo Province, South Africa. In the recent past some of the health professionals left, and that affected the service delivery and training programme in Mankweng Academic Hospital. A previous study from Mankweng Academic Hospital, Limpopo province, South Africa identified the promotion was one of the influencing factors for resignation of health professionals [8,9]. It is important to know what factors can motivate health professionals to stay. Main objective of the study is to view the valuable suggestions advocated by the resigned health professionals of Mankweng Academic Hospital. This information can be utilized to improve the retention strategies of health professionals in Mankweng Academic Hospital.

II. METHODS

Study approach and design

It is an observational retrospective descriptive quantitative study linked with all health professionals, who resigned from Mankweng Academic Hospital in a 5-year period from January 2018 to December 2022.

Study setting

This study was conducted in the Mankweng Academic Hospital, Limpopo province, South Africa which provides teaching, training program and tertiary clinical services for the population of Limpopo province. Overall, a total number of staff complement of 1279 including all health professionals were working in Mankweng Hospital in 2023. A total of 98 out of 161 medical officers approved posts and 22 of 84 medical specialist posts were filled up. For professional nurses, 125 of 360 professional nurse’s positions and for the pharmacists 10 out of 13 approved posts were occupied. For physiotherapist post 7 out of 10 and occupational therapists 5 out of 9 approved posts filled. For radiographer 9 out of 15 and psychologist 4 out 4 filled.

Study population

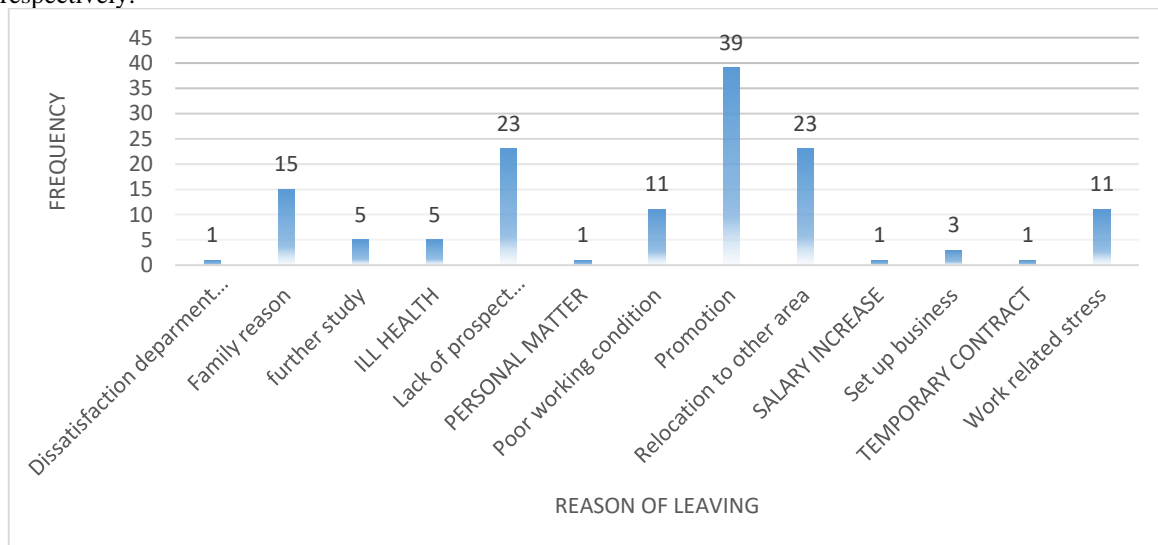
All health professions of doctor, pharmacist, professional nurse, and allied health professional who quitted during January 2018 to December 2022 were included in the study. Non health care professional (corporate, finance etc.) and health care professionals who retired at normal retirement age were excluded.

Data collection and analysis

Human Resource Manager (HRM) usually requests all resigned or retired employee to complete the questionnaires before their departure for the purpose of future assessment. Data of exit interview information sheet for 5-year period from 2018 to 2022 were retrieved from Human resource management. The data collected were documented with gender, rank, department/section in which the employee was working, first reason of leaving, and suggestions for retention of health professionals. The statistical software package (version 29) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics used to summarise the data and categorical variables were expressed as frequency and proportions. Ethical consideration: Data collected from the questionnaires and employee’ names were not displayed in the datasheet. The database document was protected with only the researcher having the password. Permission for the study was obtained from the clinical Executive Officer of Mankweng Academic Hospital dated 20/03/2023.

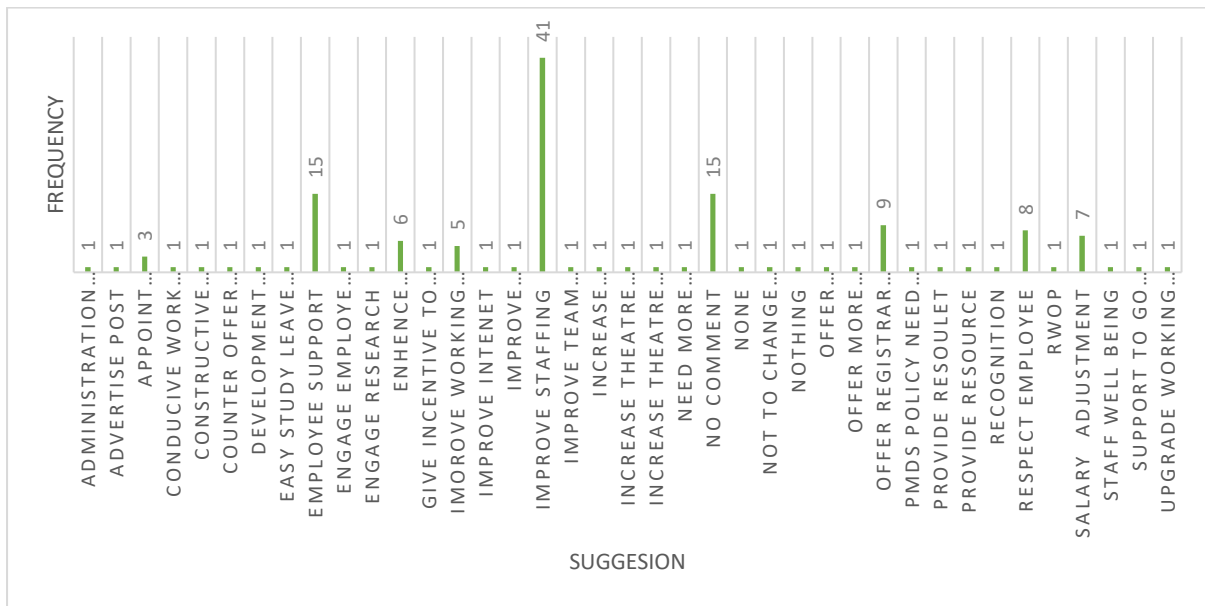
III. RESULT

Total 139 health professionals resigned from January 2018 to December 2022. Among them 45 was male health professionals and females were 74. These health professionals worked in various departments: Anaesthesia, General surgery, Gynaecology, Orthopaedics, Ophthalmology, Radiology, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Psychology, and Occupational therapy. Rank of health professional resigned: medical practitioner (Medical officer and specialist) 74(52.3%), professional nurse 47(33.8%), pharmacist 5(3.6%), physiotherapist 5(3.6%), radiographer 4(2.9%), occupational therapist 3(2.2%) and psychologist was 1(0.7%). Reason of resignation: Promotion 39(28%), lack of prospect advancement 23(17%) and relocation to other areas23(17%) are some of the main reasons for resignation. Suggestion to retain: Increase the number of staff 41(30%), support the employee 15(11%), respect the employee 8(6%) and 6(4%) indicated for promotion to retain the staff. Details Reason of leaving and suggestion for retention listed in the Graph 1 and 2 respectively.



Graph 1: Reason of leaving all categories of health professionals

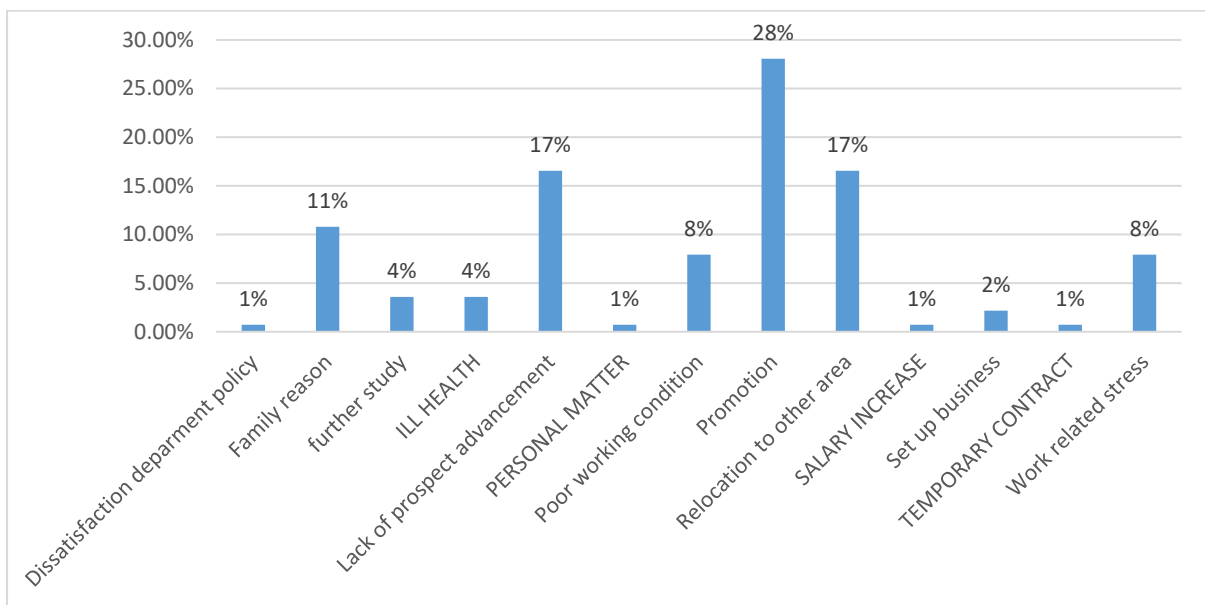
Promotion is top on the list of resignation, which was 39, followed by relocation and lack of prospect development 23, and then family reason 15, poor working conditions 11 and work-related stress 11.



Graph 2: Suggestion to retain: Improve staffing 41, Employee support 15, Offer registrar post 9, Respect employee 8, promotion 6

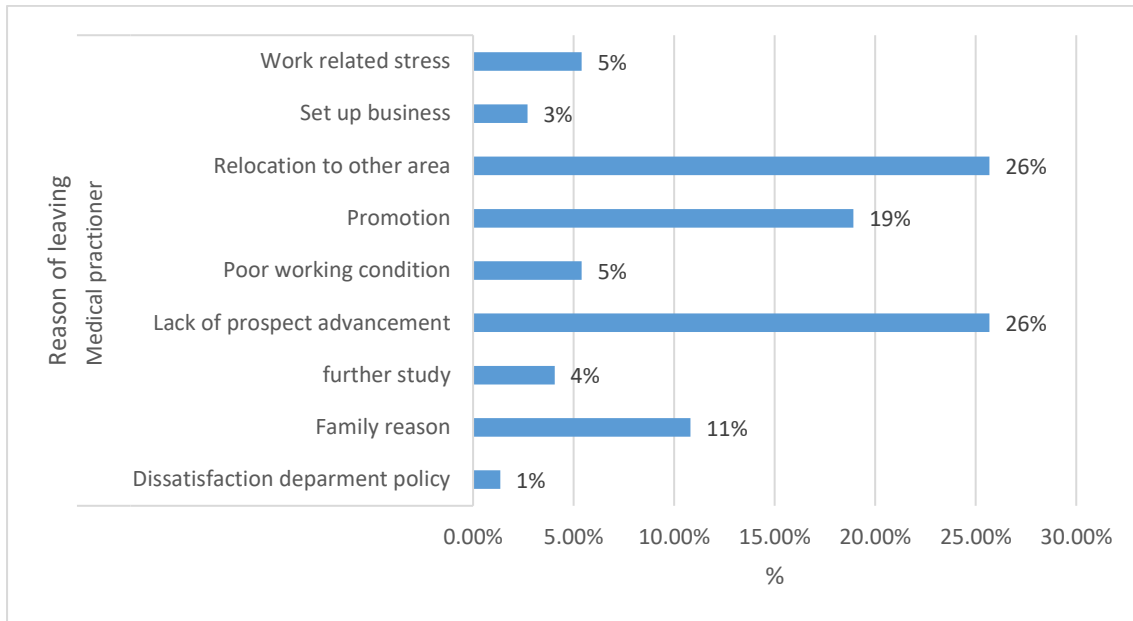
**IV. DISCUSSION:**

Over 67% female and 33% were male health professionals who quit in a 5-year period from various departments. Most important determining factors for quitting were promotion (28%), lack of prospect advancement (17%) and relocation to other areas (17%) (Graph 3). Other factors that led to resignation were poor working conditions (8%) and work-related stress (8%).



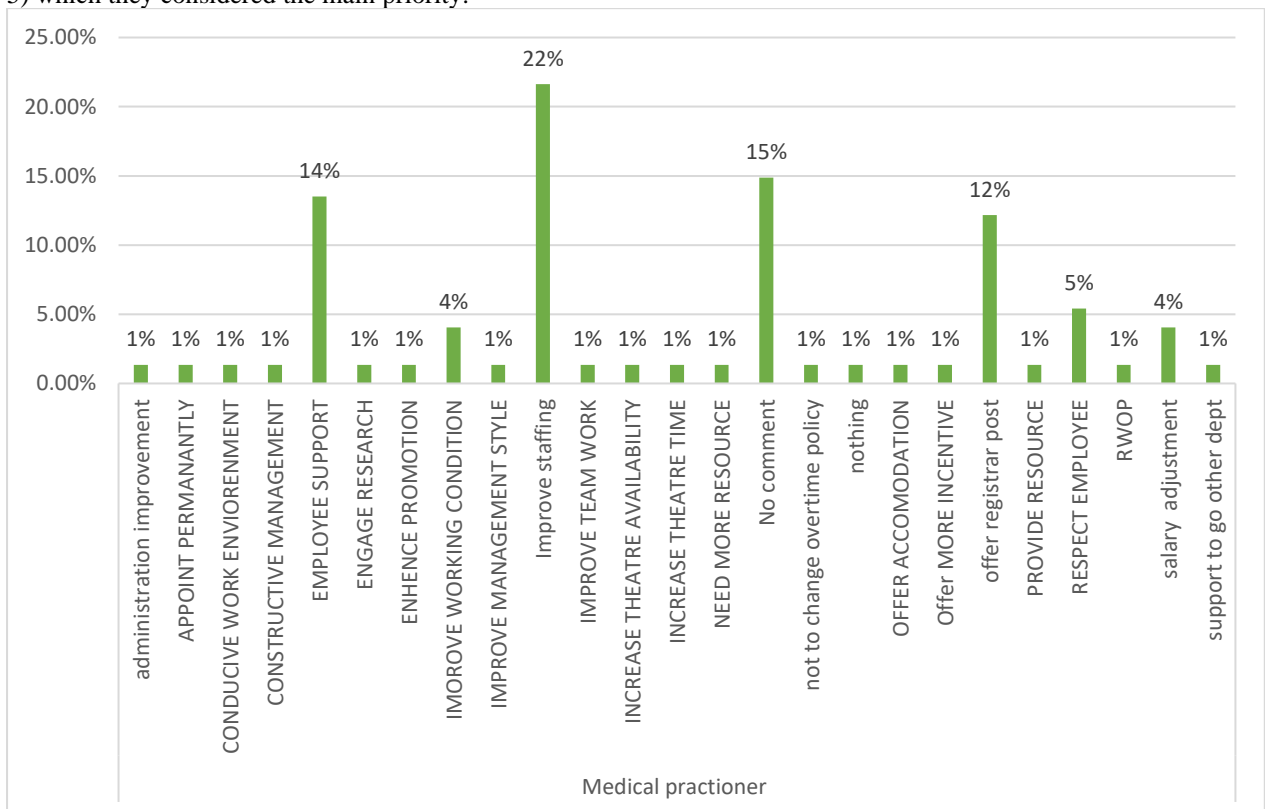
Graph 3: Main determining factors for resignation: promotion 28%, Relocation 17%, lack of prospect development 17%

Over 87% of health professionals who quit were mainly from two categories of health professionals, explicitly medical practitioners (53.3%) and professional nurses (33.8%) and further evaluation of the reason of leaving from the group of medical practitioners, it revealed that lack of prospects (26%), relocation (26%) and promotion (19%) were at the top of the list (Graph 4). Some clinical departments in Mankweng Hospital were not fully recognized for the M.Med training programme due to a shortage of the medical specialists. Consequently, few medical officers left. It is of utmost importance for the Hospital administration to engage the specialist to retain them and employ more specialist to maintain the accreditation status of relevant departments and which will reduce the turnover of medical officer who want to prospect advancement in the career.



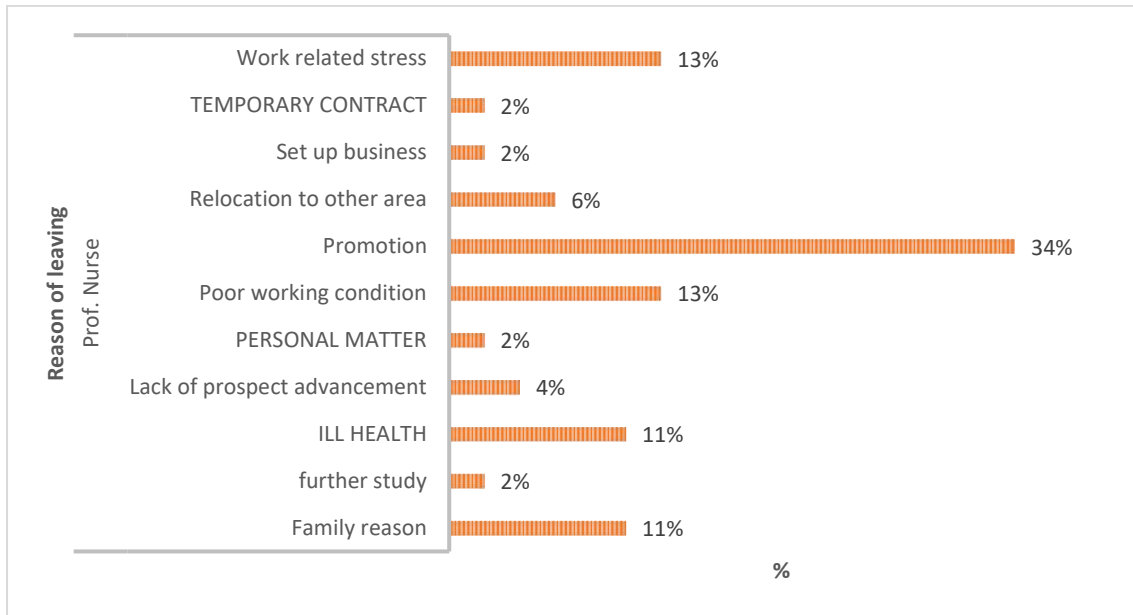
**Graph 4: Reason of resignation of medical practitioner:** Lack of prospect (26%), relocation (26%), promotion 19%.

Though, lack of prospects, relocation and promotion were at the top of the list for resigning from the group of medical practitioners, however suggestion made by them to retain the health profession was entirely different from the reason of leaving. About 22% medical practitioner suggested to increase the number of the staff (Graph 5) which they considered the main priority.

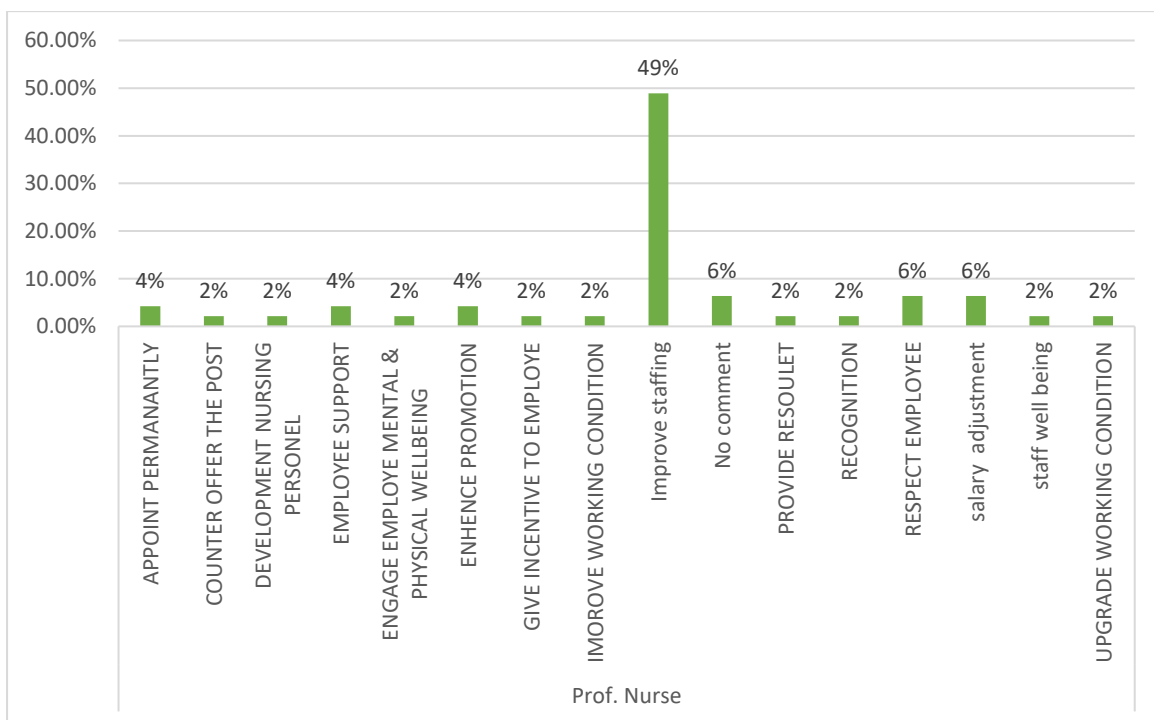


**Graph 5: Suggestion by Medical practitioner:** Improve staff 22%, employee support 14%, promotion 1%

When evaluating the resignation of professional nurse independently, 34% of them left because of lack of promotions in this hospital (Graph 6). Nevertheless, when assessing the suggestion for retaining the staff, 49% of the professional nurse advocated to increase the number of staff rather than promotion. (Graph 7).



**Graph 6: Reason of resignation of professional nurses:** Promotion (34%), poor working conditions (13%), work related stress (13%).



**Graph 7: Suggestion by Professional nurse:** Improve staff is top of the list (49%), Respect employee 6%, Promotion 4%

There are many factors associated for resignation comprising personal factors, administrative factors, distance to work or job opportunities which may not be possible to accomplish within the existing organisation [8,9,10,11,12]. Some employees move themselves into better positions that link more closely with their career purposes [13]. Promotion is one of the important associated factors for health professionals to quit from health institution [14].

Burnout is one of the other critical factors that are related to leaving the job. Burnout is predominantly caused by staffing shortages in the healthcare sector. Shortage of staffs make the working conditions more stressful which leads to fatigue. In this study, about 26% of the nursing staff and 10% of medical officers resigned because of poor working conditions and work-related stress. These resignations of health professionals affected the service delivery and training program.

Increase the number of health professional is paramount important to lessen the workload. Increase staff obviously will reduce burnout, fatigue, and stress and which ultimately assist to improve the working condition and decrease the turnover. Many literatures mention that increased staff is crucial. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 Legal guide 2019 advocated for increase recruitment and retention of the health workforce in developing countries to achieve the targets of SDG 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages [3]. Other literature clearly stated that vacant posts need to be filled to improve the service delivery and reduce the burnout and fatigue [15]. Employees are more interested to stay and work when the institution has a friendly working environment [15]. There are many vacant posts in all levels of health professionals in Mankweng Academic Hospital and it is important to hire more health professional. Recruitment of enough health professional will assist to improve the working conditions, reduce the workload and impact of which obviously reduce the turnover of staff. As a result, community will receive quality health services which is the principal objective of the health Institution. Recruitment of more health professionals will assist to fulfil the main objectives of National Health Insurance bill of South Africa to achieve universal access to quality health care services.

In this study, though many health professional left because lack of promotion (28%), however resigned employees emphasised evidently more on the increasing the number of staff (30%) rather than promotion (4%). Other suggestions advocated by the resigned health professionals were to give support the employee (11%) and respect the employee (6%) to retain the staff. Staff engagement is vital to enhance good relationships with the employee [5,6,16] and which will obviously create an environment for the respect for each other. Relationships between supervisor and employee are very important to retain the employee. [17].

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Almost 30% of all resigned health professions emphasised to increase the number of staff and only 4% advocated for promotion to retain the health professionals. Adequate staffing is fundamental in health sector. Recommendation: Increasing the number of health professionals is crucial at present in Mankweng Academic Hospital.

### Limitations and future research

One of the limitations was that the same questionnaires template was used for all health professionals. In the future, there is scope for further research and questionnaires should be set up with specific relevant questions linked to the specific category of health professional such as medical practitioner, nurse, or pharmacist.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this paper, the published research results, the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining, and using its results nor any non-financial personal relationships.

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### Data availability

Data will be made available upon reasonable request

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