Career development in nursing

ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) firmly believes that career development is a major contributing factor in the advancement of health systems and the nursing profession worldwide, and is directly linked to the maintenance of high quality care delivery. Career development must therefore be supported and sustained by means of an articulated educational system, recognised career structures (including clinical ladders) flexible enough to provide career mobility, and access to nursing intra/entrepreneurship and/or independent practice opportunities.

ICN supports research demonstrating that career mobility provides incentives for professional development and fosters higher levels of job satisfaction thus ensuring a more consistent coverage of health facilities. Appropriate reward mechanisms need to be promoted, introduced and maintained so that achievement is rewarded by recognition, advancement and/or remuneration.

The Council believes that access to continuing education and professional development is critical and a fundamental worker’s right. Continuing education should be available to all nursing personnel, using suitable means to reach those working in isolated areas.

Within the on-going review process of nurses’ education and practice systems, ICN and member national nurses associations (NNAs) are committed to developing, promoting and facilitating a comprehensive, integrated framework for the profession. This framework includes attractive and viable career structures that will support the recruitment and retention of the qualified staff required to provide quality care.

ICN and NNAs have a major role to play in determining satisfying patterns of career development in nursing, creating national and international databases and in negotiating the corresponding reward structure (i.e. recognition, advancement and/or remuneration, promotion of nurses’ interests) while supporting the regulation, professional development (including access to scholarships) and protection of nurses and the public.

ICN and NNAs are responsible and pro-active social partners, advancing the profession through the use of new technology and knowledge, while meeting changing health needs and performing in evolving infrastructures influenced by macroeconomic as well as local health sector policies.

Individual nurses have a responsibility to plan and develop their careers through continuous self-assessment and goal setting. As health care providers, they must also participate in determining collective and social development goals.

1 ILO Convention 149 on Nursing Personnel
Background

It is essential that nurses associations, governments and other bodies facilitate career development for nurses by means of articulated educational and career systems that provide opportunities for nurses to move from one category to another, or to other positions within or outside the health care system. To develop such systems, it is necessary to identify the core of knowledge, skills, attitudes and scientific principles for nursing practice.

The unique body of nursing knowledge must constantly be renewed, incorporating advances in the social, educational and health sciences and fostering the emergence of innovative approaches to care delivery. Curricula must be planned in relation to total health needs and resources of the target population and their social and cultural background.

To realise its full potential, career development of nursing personnel needs to evolve within the context of the health system as a whole and must allow for horizontal as well as vertical career mobility. Career mobility in nursing may be defined as the movement of nurses to more advanced levels, to different areas of nursing practice or to positions in which different functions predominate, including nurse entrepreneurship and independent, autonomous professional roles (e.g. advanced practice, consultant).

Career mobility is important to nurses in furthering their careers and to society in allowing nursing to adapt and respond to changing health needs. Career mobility enables nurses to achieve personal career goals and contributes to the nursing profession by raising the competency of its members. Career mobility allows nursing to respond to scientific, technological, social, political and economic changes by modifying or expanding the roles, composition and supply of nursing personnel to meet identified health needs.

ICN and NNAs are prepared to take the lead as needed in initiating, promoting or further developing systems of continuing nursing education, ensuring whenever possible that these educational opportunities lead to recognised credentials. They agree to work with government and health agencies in developing and/or conducting continuing education programmes within the nursing and/or general education system while promoting the recognition of nurses’ core competencies and supporting mutual recognition of qualifications among countries.

ICN and NNAs recognise that the best patient and community outcomes depend on good practice supported by high levels of professional competency. The individual nurse has the major responsibility to establish and maintain competence in professional practice and contribute to her/his own development. It is however acknowledged that other stakeholders also have a role to play (e.g. employer, government) and must be held accountable.
The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.

### Related ICN Positions:
- Socio economic welfare of nurses
- Scope of nursing practice
- Health Human Resources Development (HHRD)

### ICN Publications:
- Career Planning and Development Programme, Geneva, ICN, 2001
- Guidelines on planning human resources for nursing, Geneva, ICN, 1993