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New report calls for global action plan to address nursing workforce crisis and prevent an avoidable healthcare disaster

Geneva, Switzerland; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA; 24 January 2022 – A new report has revealed how the COVID-19 pandemic has made the fragile state of the global nursing workforce much worse, putting the World Health Organization’s (WHO) aim of Universal Health Coverage at serious risk. It suggests up to 13 million more nurses will be required over the next decade, the equivalent of almost half of the world’s current 28 million-strong workforce.

International Council of Nurses (ICN) Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton, who co-authored the report, said the findings underlined the severity of the shortages:

“We knew the situation was fragile because of the persistent historical underfunding of nursing around the world, but with the latest information about nurse vacancies, their rates of intention to leave, and staff sickness rates, it must now be recognised as a global crisis.

‘We already had a shortage of six million nurses at the start of the pandemic, but with the immense and relentless pressure of responding to COVID and the Omicron variant, and an avalanche of resignations and retirements anticipated, the world will need to recruit and retain up to 13 million nurses over the next decade.

‘The WHO’s International Year of the Nurse and Midwife in 2020 and last year’s International Year of the Health Care Worker were an important starting point in recognising the true value of nurses and other health workers, but it simply was not enough. This is a global health crisis, and it requires a fully funded and actionable ten-year plan to support and strengthen nurses and the health and care workforce to deliver health for all.’

The report, published today by the International Centre for Nurse Migration in partnership with CGFNS and ICN, provides a blueprint for what needs to be done at the national and international level to guide nursing workforce planning globally. It says countries should commit to prioritising nurses for vaccinations, provide safe staffing levels, expand their domestic nurse education systems, increase the attractiveness of nursing careers for women and men, adhere to ethical international recruitment standards, and monitor countries’ ability to be self-sufficient to meet their nursing workforce requirements.

CGFNS International Inc. President and Chief Executive Officer Dr Franklin A. Shaffer, another co-author of the report, added:

“We can anticipate that there will be a migration tsunami as more than ever before, countries around the world turn to the international nursing supply to meet their workforce needs. The pre-existing unequal distribution of nurses around the world will be exacerbated by large-scale international recruitment to high-income countries as they look for a ‘quick fix’ solution to solving their nursing shortages, which will only widen inequalities in access to healthcare globally.”

Lead author of the report, Professor James Buchan of the University of Technology Sydney, (UTS) and the University of Edinburgh, said:

“COVID-19 has had a terrible impact on the nursing workforce in terms of the personal effect it has had on individual nurses, and the problems it has exposed within many healthcare systems. Pre-existing shortages exacerbated the impact of the pandemic and burned-out nurses are leaving because they cannot carry on any longer. Governments have not reacted effectively to the growing worldwide shortage of nurses, and now they must respond to the pandemic, which is an alarming game-changer that requires immediate action.”

The report says a long-term plan is needed to stem the tide of those leaving nursing because of the additional stresses resulting from COVID-19, and to create a new generation of nurses to grow the profession to meet increased future demands of an ageing global population.

ICN President Pamela Cipriano said:

“Nurses have been on the front lines of the pandemic for two years now. The influence they have had on the survival and health of the people they serve has been enormous. Despite enduring heavy emotional and physical burdens of providing care for their patients and communities, they have shown great resilience. But resiliency has its limits.

“Without nurses, it is clear our health systems would collapse. All of the evidence in this report shows that it is vital to act on a new ten-year plan that guarantees investments to stabilize and build the nursing workforce. Delivering on commitments to support nurses with safe work environments, staffing levels and workloads, involvement in decision-making, mental health services and equitable compensation will catalyse interest and growth to build the profession. Nurses deserve to be recognised and rewarded for their immeasurable contributions to the health of people everywhere.”

Mr Catton added: “We can no longer afford to undervalue and underfund the nursing profession, not only for the sake of the health of nurses, but for the protection and sustainability of our entire global health system. Let’s be clear: we are not talking about stop-gap solutions, getting through the current pandemic, or even preparing for the next. We are talking about being able to address all the healthcare needs that have built up and been delayed since the onset of the pandemic. If we do not address all these present and urgent needs in a sustainable way over the next decade, the WHO’s ambition of Universal Health Coverage will be thwarted.”

According to Dr Shaffer: “Ethical and properly monitored international migration will always provide individual nurses with an opportunity to develop their careers and follow their dreams. But as this report shows, governments must act quickly to ensure that people everywhere have access to nursing expertise whenever they need it. CGFNS and the ICNM can help governments to ensure that international recruitment is ethical and that both the recruiting countries and the nurses involved can benefit from the process.”

Attached please find the report and here is the [link](#) to the regional summary of the report.

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Note to Editors

The **International Centre on Nurse Migration** (ICNM) serves as a comprehensive knowledge resource created by CGFNS International Inc. (CGFNS) in partnership with the International Council of Nurses (ICN). ICNM emphasizes the development, promotion and dissemination of research, policy and information on

global nurse migration and human resources in nursing. This resource centre features news, resources, and publications widely available to policy makers, planners, and practitioners.

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) 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 care for all and sound health policies globally.

CGFNS International Inc. (CGFNS) is an immigration neutral non-profit organization that helps foreign educated healthcare professionals live and work in their country of choice by assessing and validating their academic and professional credentials. CGFNS is ISO Certified, and an NGO in Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which serves as the central forum for international and social issues.

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