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ICN COVID-2019 Update: Data on infected healthcare workers and access to protective equipment vital in prevention of the virus

Geneva, Switzerland, 20 February 2020 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) continues to liaise with the World Health Organization (WHO) which is spearheading the global initiative to prevent the spread of the COVID-2019 virus. ICN is also closely supporting its national nursing associations in China and the region where nurses are on the front line caring for patients with the virus and putting themselves at risk.

Information from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention shows more than 3000 healthcare workers infected with the virus. Howard Catton, ICN's CEO, said it was crucial that we gather more information on the groups of healthcare workers affected to further identify modes of transmission, and when and how they are being diagnosed, in order to manage and protect them and prevent the further spread of the virus.

He added that more information is also urgently required about the availability and supply of essential personal protective equipment (PPE), which appears not to be reaching all nurses and other healthcare workers exposed to COVID-2019 in China.

Mr. Catton said it was important that front line nurses be made aware of the new [WHO guidelines](#), which cover their rights and responsibilities, and give advice on how to stay safe whilst dealing with the virus. He asked ICN's nursing associations to give their feedback on the guidelines. He also urged nurses to inform the public about other [WHO guidance](#) which gives advice on when to use face masks and other preventative measures.

Latest information from WHO shows that more than 70,000 people are confirmed to have the virus, with around 12,000 severe cases and nearly 2,000 deaths.

Mr. Catton said:

“This is a serious and ongoing situation and we know that the Chinese government is pouring massive resources into treating people who have the virus and into measures aimed at containing it.

‘Working with these patients takes an immense physical and emotional toll on nurses, and sadly, as has happened before, nurses working in the frontline with patients who have the virus are at risk of contracting it themselves.

‘I am sure I speak on behalf the whole global nursing family when I say how proud I am of the courageous nurses who are delivering essential care to these patients in very difficult conditions. Latest figures suggest that around 3,000 healthcare staff have been infected and many of them will be nurses. We urgently need to have a breakdown of the staff groups that are affected to further identify the modes of transmission and improve the safety of nurses and other health professionals.

‘It is imperative that proper personal protective equipment is available to all staff who need it, but we have heard from our colleagues in China that this is not

always the case. We need details about the availability of such equipment in China. Wherever they are, nurses have the right to be protected in the workplace and we urge all governments to ensure that sufficient and appropriate PPE is available whenever it is needed.”

ICN is constantly liaising with the Chinese Nursing Association (CNA) and we are aware that several of our member National Nursing Associations have sent messages of support and donations to their friends and colleagues in China. ICN is managing and coordinating these efforts with the CNA to ensure they are processed quickly and effectively.

Mr Catton concluded:

‘It is gratifying but not surprising to see this show of solidarity among nurses. We must all be vigilant and make sure that this deadly infection is contained wherever it emerges. This is especially true in places where healthcare systems are in a poor underfunded state. Global events such as this highlight the importance of a world-wide approach to problems, and the need to strengthen all healthcare systems so that this and future similar events can be dealt with efficiently and with the minimum loss of life.’

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Note to Editors

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.

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