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ICN COVID-19 Update: New guidance on mental health and psychosocial support will help to alleviate effects of stress on hard-pressed staff

Geneva, Switzerland, 27 February 2020 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) continues to be in close contact with the World Health Organization (WHO) and offering support to our member National Nursing Associations (NNAs) concerning COVID-19.

WHO's latest data suggest that whereas the spread of the COVID-2019 virus may be decreasing in China, there are worrying outbreaks in various countries, including South Korea, Italy and Iran. ICN is in regular contact with all our associations in these countries and offering support, including managing a solidarity fund aimed at helping the worst hit areas in China. Along with WHO, we are closely monitoring the spread of the virus and keeping in contact with our associations in the affected countries.

ICN welcomes the fact that WHO this week will issue guidance on mental health and psychosocial support for people affected by the virus, and for the staff caring for them.

While stress and anxiety are a normal reaction in a crisis situation, it is important that psychological support is available where it is needed, including for those who are burdened with providing care for the sick in these circumstances.

Many nurses will be working long stressful shifts during which they are exposed to a great deal of human suffering. Their mental wellbeing is extremely important if they are to be able to continue to provide the highest quality care possible.

ICN will be monitoring the effects of the mental health and other guidance, and will welcome any feedback from NNAs and individual nurses about their efficacy.

We are still concerned about the availability of personal protective equipment for nurses working in close contact with infected patients. WHO has said that production and distribution of such equipment has been increased, but we will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that nurses are not put at risk during the course of their work.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said:

“The pictures we have seen of exhausted nurses shows how they are putting their patients’ needs before their own. It is always humbling to see how our colleagues step forward when they are needed, even though they may be exposing themselves to dangers at work.

‘I want to remind all nurses about looking after themselves and the importance of teaching their patients and colleagues about good infection control. We all need to take care of ourselves if there is any chance that we could be at risk of contracting this dangerous

infection. It comes down to simple but effective measures, most importantly regular and effective hand-washing.”

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

“We often hear people talk about nurses being on the front line of healthcare, but in the fight against this new and deadly virus, nurses *are* the front line of defence. ICN will continue to ensure that their voices are heard and press WHO and governments to provide them with the vital resources they need.

‘Many nurses in affected areas will now be very tired from their long stressful shifts, so we are calling on employers to ensure that they get adequate breaks during and between their shifts so that they can continue to carry out their compassionate and courageous duty.

‘We asked our colleagues at WHO this week what more could be done to ensure that nurses are receiving adequate PPE protective equipment and we received assurances that more equipment is being produced and supplied to the affected areas. We will continue to monitor this situation and offer support and advice where appropriate.’”

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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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