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The COVID Effect: Renewed interest in nursing careers undermined by discontent and disputes over pay & working conditions

Geneva, Switzerland, 29 April 2021 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) today launched a [report](#) on its latest survey of its National Nursing Associations (NNAs) which reveals increasing evidence of disputes over pay and terms and conditions of employment, violence and intimidation, and the lack of personal protective equipment. More than **20%** of NNAs surveyed have expressed significant concerns and unrest related to pay of nurses in their countries. In addition, the report shows further effects of the pandemic, including interruptions to the supply of newly qualified nurses and cancelled ongoing professional education for qualified nurses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the public has become increasingly aware of the essential work that nurses do and the difference they make. As a result, nursing has never been more highly valued in the eyes of the public. This has also led to a surge in interest in nursing careers, especially in higher income countries. However, warns that ongoing disputes are in danger of putting off the next generation of nurses, especially in the countries that are most in need of expanding their nursing workforce.

The COVID Effect is a growing and far-reaching phenomenon that is having a profound impact on the professional and personal lives of individual nurses. Lack of protection, long and stressful shifts are severely impacting their mental health, resulting in nurses leaving or planning to leave the profession.

We know from the [State of the World's Nursing report](#) and our own [Ageing Well report](#) that the world is facing a shortage of at least ten million nurses over the next decade, so it is vital that existing nurses stay in their jobs, and that a new generation can be attracted into the profession.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said: “Nurses have had a terrible year, but perhaps for the first time ever, the public has seen in detail the traumas they have faced and the effects these have had on nurses’ health and wellbeing. But despite the hardships on show, many people have realised the importance and true value of nursing and expressed a willingness to join the profession, so that they too can experience what it is like to provide care in the unique way only nurses can.

‘Governments should act quickly to ensure that there are well signposted pathways into nursing, so that we can start to recruit the next generation as soon as possible. Being a nurse is the most rewarding job on Earth, but nurses also need to be able to pay their bills and feed and support their families. So, today, I am calling on governments to invest in nurses’ pay and education for now and the future.’

The report shows that, in some countries, the COVID Effect is delaying nursing students being able to finish their courses, which is slowing down the supply of newly qualified nurses by between six and 12 months. It is also disrupting essential professional development training for qualified nurses, which they need to be able to keep up to date with the latest practice.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said: “The COVID Effect is a growing and far-reaching phenomenon that is having profound impacts on nurses across the global, including on their education, their health and wellbeing, and their family lives.

‘There is now a chasm between the rhetoric of governments about how they value nurses, and their practical responses to the challenges that nurses are facing every day. This disconnect is resulting in increasing discontent among the world’s nurses, resulting in protests and disputes that risk undermining recruitment and retention in the profession. Nursing is the foundation stone of the COVID response, but it also underpins any hope we have that our health systems will be able to be built back stronger and address the enormous and still growing backlog of non-COVID health.

‘Every patient and family that has received care from a nurse during this pandemic has personally witnessed the true value of nursing. But the pandemic has also clearly demonstrated that nursing care has an economic impact that is way beyond the value that governments have placed on it. The primary responsibility of elected leaders is to keep people safe, but COVID-19 has shown that you simply cannot do that without real and sustained investment in nurses and the healthcare workforce. This is a commitment that must be written into the heart of the post-pandemic treaty that world leaders are now negotiating.’

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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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