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International Council of Nurses calls for governments to accept all recommendations of WHO *State of the World's Nursing* report

“Politicians, be as brave and courageous as those nurses currently fighting COVID-19. Be as brave and courageous in your political leadership and say ‘yes’ to implementing all recommendations!”

Geneva, Switzerland, 7 April 2020 – A seminal report on the [State of the World's Nursing](#) published by the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and Nursing Now says a properly resourced, educated and valued nursing workforce can enhance the health and wellbeing of everybody on the planet.

With its timely release during the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife and the COVID-19 pandemic, when the world's reliance on its health workers is evident, the report provides an unprecedented analysis of the size and nature of the global nursing workforce. Using data from over 190 WHO Member States, the report provides the evidence and data to inform governments of where investment should go in order to have the biggest impact on population health. Its main messages to governments are about investing in a massive expansion of nurse education, creating six million new nursing jobs by 2030, and strengthening nursing leadership.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said:

“This seminal report provides an evidence-based overview of the world's nursing workforce and I am grateful to our National Nursing Associations and the world's governments for their contributions to the rich information it contains.

‘The data enable us to see for the first time the stark variations in nursing numbers between countries and continents and show us where investment is most needed. This report will be extremely valuable as a benchmark on which governments can build their nursing resources so that everyone can benefit from the unique service that only nurses can provide.’”

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

“What do nurses hope will happen now that the data is in? Quite simply, that political leaders will commit to implement all recommendations. This is not optional or nice thing to do in light of COVID-19, it is a “must do”! This is the Year of the Nurse and Midwife – not the one that any of us had envisaged - but the COVID-19 outbreak is the most powerful demonstration of why we need to support and invest in our nursing workforce. We call on the world's leaders to commit to appointing a Chief Nursing Officer; to commit to a long term plan to strengthen health systems which has nursing and the health workforce right at its heart; and to commit to ensuring health workers are protected with personal protective equipment that they need.

‘We must recognise that no country is an island; this is an international and global crisis and we need cooperation across borders to get much-needed supplies to healthcare

worker, to share best practice, and to ensure manufacturers step up. It will be the greatest tragedy if we do not learn the lessons from this pandemic. We need to see hard actions around investment, support and strengthening of health systems and the health workforce in the future. We call on politicians to be as brave and courageous as those nurses currently fighting COVID-19. Be as brave and courageous in your political leadership and say 'yes' to implementing all recommendations”

The report provides a compelling case for a decade of action to produce a marked increase in investment in nursing education, jobs and leadership as part of the global effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and provide universal health coverage and health for all.

Data from 191 countries reveals there are 19.3 million professional nurses out of a total nursing workforce of 27.9 million, and that their distribution around the globe is not uniform, with lower nurse-to-population ratios in middle and low-income countries.

The report says 36 million nurses will be required by 2030, and that target will only be reached if there is an 8% increase year-on-year in the total number of nursing graduates. Without this increase there will be a shortage of 4.6 million nurses by 2030, primarily in the African, South-East Asian and Eastern Mediterranean regions.

With a workforce that is approximately 90% female, nurses continue to face discrimination and inequality, including pay and gender biases. The statistics in the report show a third of nurses report not being respected or valued and a quarter say they have experienced sexual harassment. This demonstrates the importance of implementing gender-sensitive working policies to support a workforce that predominantly female.

One of the stark findings of the report is the maldistribution of the nursing workforce, which is exacerbated by high-income countries recruiting nurses from lower- and middle-income countries.

Howard Catton said:

“We need all countries to commit to self-sufficiency in the supply of their workforce, not just to say it, but to do it. COVID-19 is demonstrating that our nursing workforce is the bedrock of preparedness and strong health systems and it is also showing that investing in nurses and healthcare workers is good for our economies, our national security, even our personal freedoms.”

Many countries have large numbers of nurses approaching retirement age. These countries must take urgent action to increase the number of nursing students in training to offset the impending retirement of their most experienced and valued members of the workforce. However, ICN stresses that, whilst recruitment and education are hugely important, so too is retention of the current workforce through improving working conditions and remuneration.

Annette Kennedy said:

“In five- or ten-years' time, we will look back on this report and be able to identify the improvements to global health that have occurred where the required investment has taken place. But we will also be able to see those countries who, by failing to invest properly in their nursing workforce, will have let their populations down.

‘The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world the true value of nursing. This is a time for bold action by brave politicians whose timely decisions will leave a mark on history that will be appreciated by generations to come.’

Click [here](#) to read the full State of the World's Nursing report.

Click [here](#) for the video message of Howard Catton in connection with the SOWN Report.

Note for 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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