



Press Information . Communiqué de presse . Comunicado de prensa

International Council of Nurses reacts to sentencing US nurse found guilty of negligent homicide

Geneva, Switzerland, 15 May 2022 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) says it is grateful that the sentence given to United States nurse RaDonda Vaught following a medical error, was less harsh than had been feared. However ICN warns the prosecution would not make healthcare safer for patients: rather it would make it more difficult to learn from mistakes and prevent errors in the future. Ms Vaught was sentenced to three years on probation in a case which has been followed by nurses around the world.

Ms Vaught, a former Tennessee intensive care nurse who made a drug administration error in 2017 that killed 75 year-old patient Charlene Murphey, was found guilty of criminally negligent homicide and impaired adult abuse on 25 March 2022.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) has been supporting Ms. Vaught through the case and submitted a letter to the court expressing the legal reasons from a professional nursing perspective for leniency. ICN's [statement](#) of 30 March condemning the criminalisation of medical errors was formally brought as an exhibit before the court to be considered before sentencing.

Responding to the sentencing of Ms Vaught on 13 May, ICN President Pamela Cipriano said nurses around the world will see themselves in Ms Vaught and ICN was grateful that the views of ANA and ICN were considered by the court. However Dr Cipriano said criminalising a nurse's mistake, would weigh heavily on the nursing profession and could reverse years of progress on improving patient safety. It is well known that most errors result from systems failings, not careless individuals.

Dr Cipriano said: "Nurses need to work in safe organisations, where measures are in place to prevent mistakes, and where they are encouraged to declare errors within a no-blame culture that takes the lessons from errors and builds additional safety practices and accountability into systems in response. To find a nurse guilty of negligent homicide for a medical error creates a potential threat to practice that could lead to more healthcare workers covering up errors and result in missed opportunities for improving patient safety. It is a step backwards that could also create a situation where many nurses and other health workers will stop practising, rather than face the prospect of jail time if they were to make a mistake. We thank our ICN member ANA for the support they have given Ms Vaught."

The World Health Organization, in collaboration with ICN, has developed a Global Patient Safety Action plan, which recognises that a safe organisation is one where there is a no-blame culture of openness and transparency.

The American Nurses Association issued a [statement](#)

* * *

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.

For more information please contact Gyorgy Madarasz, Press Officer at madarasz@icn.ch
Tel: +41 22 908 01 16

www.icn.ch