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International Council of Nurses says worldwide death toll from COVID-19 among nurses estimated at 100 may be far higher

Geneva, Switzerland, 20 April 2020 – More than 100 nurses from around the world have died as a result of contracting COVID-19 in the course of their duty. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) believes that the actual number of deaths among nurses may already be much higher than that current estimate.

ICN calls on all governments to accurately record the number of nurses and other healthcare workers who are infected with the virus, and the names of those who die from it. The World Health Organization (WHO) should collate and share this information so that it can add to the science by identifying who contracted the virus, and where, when and how the disease may have progressed.

WHO says at least 23,000 healthcare workers have been infected in more than 50 countries, but there is no breakdown of how many of those are nurses, and no centralised systematic recording of such infections and deaths.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said:

“Each of these deaths is a tragedy: the thought of these nurses, who are mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, losing their lives because of the caring work they do, is truly heart breaking.

‘And it is made much more so because of the additional risks they may have faced as a result of not having access to appropriate personal protective equipment to keep them safe. This should never have happened, and it must never happen again.

‘Governments have a responsibility to keep all their citizens safe and in terms of coordinating the manufacture and distribution of PPE, they have failed to put in the necessary resources or levels of innovation which are required to address an issue which is not going away any time soon.’

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton has called on leaders of the G-20 group of countries and world leaders everywhere to put aside any differences they may have to ensure that the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) is their number one priority.

“We recognise it is a challenge to supply the correct PPE to the right place at the right time, and we have written to the G-20 leaders asking them to work together and not to politically self-isolate. They have the power to change this situation by negotiating contracts and helping with the manufacture and distribution of this crucial life-saving equipment.”

The ICN CEO said that collecting data on infection rates and deaths of nurses was a vital part of understanding and therefore preventing and containing the virus.

“We are not talking about data for data’s sake but rather adding to the scientific knowledge base which informs infection prevention and control measures. What gets measured counts and despite accolades and applause, if we are not counting and keeping accurate data, then we are failing to honour and recognise nurses, some of whom have already made the ultimate sacrifice. Also,

importantly, by doing this we can save more lives - both health workers' and the public's - in the future.

Mr Catton said that while governments are understandably preoccupied with dealing with the pandemic, now is also the time that they should start thinking about what happens when the pandemic is over.

“Around the world people are applauding the work of nurses and other health workers, and governments are saying how much they value their healthcare workforces. But when the applause dies down, when the accolades stop, governments need to have an honest look at their health systems.

‘The COVID-19 pandemic has shown health workers at their finest, often working long hours in terrible situations. But it has also exposed weaknesses in our health systems that must be addressed. Many countries need a significant and sustained investment in their healthcare systems to bring them to an acceptable level.

‘Economic recession now looks inevitable, and governments will have to make difficult decisions about funding services, but this pandemic has shown that healthcare funding is not a luxury, and world leaders should back up their welcome praise with a commitment to properly fund healthcare in the future.’”

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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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