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International Council of Nurses calls for data on healthcare worker infection rates and deaths

Failure by governments to record infection rates and deaths of healthcare workers is a scandal that puts staff at higher risk and underestimates the true scale of the problem

Geneva, Switzerland, 6 May 2020 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) calls on governments to immediately start keeping accurate records of infections and deaths among healthcare workers: failure to do so increases the chances of more deaths and fails to honour those who have died.

Last month, ICN reported that more than 100 nurses from around the world had died after contracting COVID-19. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) had reported 23,000 healthcare worker infections.

The figures released by ICN and WHO are shocking, but ICN now believes them to significantly underestimate the situation.

ICN has gathered further information from its member National Nursing Associations (NNAs, some official government figures and media reports), which suggest that at least **90,000 healthcare workers have been infected, and more than 260 nurses have died.**

Thousands of nurses have been infected with COVID-19 and hundreds have already died, but governments cannot say exactly how many because they are not collecting the data. This lack of accurate data has led to a serious underestimation of the infection rate among nurses, and the number of deaths.

ICN says this failure to record both infection rates and deaths among healthcare workers is putting more nurses and their patients in danger.

ICN is calling for data on healthcare worker infections and deaths to be systematically collected by national governments and held centrally at the WHO. Such a move would show respect to the nurses who have given their lives, but also inform prevention strategies, such as addressing fundamental issues, including testing and the lack of personal protective equipment (PPE).

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

“The lack of official data on infections and deaths among nurses and other healthcare workers is scandalous. Nurses and healthcare workers have been put at greater risk because of the lack of PPE and poor preparedness for this pandemic. As a result, we have seen infection rates and, tragically, deaths rise on a daily basis. Governments’

failure to collect this information in a consistent way means we do not have the data that would add to the science that could improve infection control and prevention measures and save the lives of other healthcare workers.

‘If governments fail to act on this, I fear we may look back on this pandemic and count the dead among our nursing colleagues in the thousands.’

ICN’s data is from 30 countries. It shows that, on average, 6% of all confirmed cases of COVID-19 are among healthcare workers, with a range from 0% to 18%. If that proportion were repeated globally, the 3.5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 around the world would yield a figure for the number of infected healthcare workers of 210,000.

Mr Catton continued:

“If governments do not count the number of nurses who have lost their lives, if they continue to turn a blind eye, it sends a message that those nurses’ lives didn’t count. Having this data will help to focus the minds of government ministers and officials on what matters most: saving people’s lives.

‘ICN has made every effort to influence governments, hold them to account and prevent the deaths of our nursing colleagues. When the history of the 2020 pandemic is written, we will make sure that the names of the nurses who gave their lives are recorded and honoured, so that their sacrifice is never forgotten.

‘And if governments still fail to act, we will make sure that when the post COVID-19 inquiries take place, as they inevitably will, political leaders will be asked why that information was not collected.’

You may find the video message of Howard Catton about nurse deaths [here](#).

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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.

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

www.icn.ch
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