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ICN CEO says governments should invest rapidly in advanced nursing roles to maximise effectiveness of healthcare systems in a post-pandemic world

Final day of ICN Advanced Practice Nursing Conference

Geneva, Switzerland, 1 September 2021 – The 11th ICN Nurse Practitioner and Advanced Practice Network Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia successfully concluded earlier today. The three-day conference, which was addressed by Canadian premier Justin Trudeau, saw more than 1,000 advanced practice nurses from around the world meet virtually to discuss how to have a wider reach and bigger impact on healthcare everywhere.

In his closing address to the conference, International Council of Nurses (ICN) Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton congratulated nurses working in advanced roles for focusing on the future health needs of the planet and global health.

“That positive focus is right for now, despite some of the events we see unfurling around the world and the fragile and perilous state that our world appears to be in. We know that COVID has taken an enormous toll on the nursing workforce globally, and ICN has run a commentary on its impact on nurses and nursing around the world.

‘Events in recent days in Haiti and Afghanistan have shown us how nursing and healthcare have been severely impacted, and we have also had the renewed warnings around climate change and the threat that it poses to the health of our planet. When I look at these issues, and ICN has been working closely with those countries that have been directly affected, what is clear is that nurses and nursing are right at the centre of the response to both natural and man-made disasters.

‘Nurses are ensuring not just that care is delivered but that there is increased access to care, and that it is safe, equitable and sustainable, and also that the values that care are based on are ones which put people at the centre. And as a consequence, I think that we are seeing a change in the way that people and the world’s leaders see and evaluate nurses and the nursing contribution.

‘The pictures that have been beamed into our living rooms have shown the care, but also the courage, bravely and the technological and expert skills of nurses everywhere. People have also seen that the nursing contribution is not just important for our health and wellbeing, but also for our economic prosperity and for our individual freedoms. And as a result, we have seen changes in the attitude of the public towards nursing. Many people who had old-fashioned traditional views of nursing have been challenged because they have seen the modern-day realities of nursing, and they have seen our health is so intimately linked to the safety, security and peacefulness of the communities and societies that we live in.

‘So out of these disasters, the pandemic, the fragilities that we have seen, nursing has clearly come forward and shown solutions. And advanced practice is at the pinnacle of those solutions to our planet’s healthcare needs. Around the world we know that our health and political leaders are continuing to face the ongoing pandemic. But waiting times are increasing, unmet needs are

growing, and people are asking “how can we cope with this? How can we recover and build from the pandemic and meet those other healthcare needs?”

‘At ICN we have been bringing forward case studies about advanced nursing from around the world showing nurses leading new, innovative and sometimes entrepreneurial care across a variety of settings addressing physical and mental health needs. Many of those case studies have shown how nurse-led solutions can be at the heart of meeting all healthcare needs. If the recovery from the pandemic has nurse-led models and advanced practice nursing at its heart, I believe we can move more quickly to ensure that all health needs are addressed, and have more sustainable health systems.

‘But it’s not just about the delivery of healthcare. Through the pandemic and the responses to various disasters, we have seen how nursing leadership is critical to design and policy decisions in health systems. It’s not just that nurses can ensure safe and effective delivery of care. They know how to design those health systems to meet people’s needs, that are responsive, that put people at their very centre. We must continue to work so that all our policy leaders see advanced nursing as the foundation stone upon which we can recover and build stronger healthcare systems.

‘There are also some fundamental questions about the type of societies we want to live in, the values it is based on: non-discrimination, respect for human rights, delivering social justice. Maybe these are things we, as a profession, have not spoken about publicly enough, but we know they are at the core of our code of ethics and how we go about delivering care. And those values are absolutely inseparable from the design of healthcare systems that will ensure safe, effective, accessible-to-all care systems.

‘We know that nurses are highly respected and trusted right around the world, but the reason for that are the values on which our profession is based. This is a time like no other, when the world is in desperate need of our values to help lead it through the challenges we are facing right now, but also for the future that we all want to see. Your future-focused, global health programme has been right for this moment and advanced practice nursing will remain at the centre of the strategic direction that ICN is moving in.”

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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