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The global voice of nursing

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New ICN report shows governments are failing to prioritize nurses as number of confirmed COVID-19 nurse deaths passes 1000

As the number of confirmed COVID-19 nurse deaths passes 1000, latest ICN report reveals that less than half of the countries surveyed classify COVID-19 as occupational disease - adding to a litany of complaints showing nurses are not being prioritized by governments. ICN calls on governments to take action to rectify this scandalous situation.

Geneva, Switzerland; 16 September 2020 - On the eve of the World Health Organization's World Patient Safety Day which this year focuses on health workforce safety, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) launches its latest COVID-19 report. The report which includes a survey of a number of ICN's National Nurses Associations reveals the continuing and catastrophic increase in the number of deaths and infection rates of nurses due to COVID-19. ICN calls on governments to address their collective failure to prioritize health workers across the board, including lack of data collection on infection rates and inadequate PPE, particularly in care homes, as well as inadequate testing and IPC training, plus extensive reports of violence and discrimination against nurses, and a lack of mental health support.

The report finds that more than 1000 nurses have died in 44 countries where data was available, with health worker infection rates on average around 10% of total infections globally. This suggests that with almost 30 million people infected with the virus, as many as three million may be health workers. The survey also reveals less than half of countries surveyed classify COVID-19 as an occupational disease, which has serious implications for compensation from illness to death.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said, "ICN's latest survey is a disturbing snapshot of how nurses and other health workers are still being exposed to COVID-19 and all its associated risks, including violence and prejudice, mental illness, infection and in what we now believe to be possibly thousands of cases, making the ultimate sacrifice by paying with their lives.

"We talk about the new norm created by the pandemic, but it has also confirmed some long-understood truths in the nursing community, that nurses are undervalued, underpaid and sometimes treated as expendable. This is a scandalous situation which ICN urges governments to rectify."

ICN CEO Howard Catton said, "The report's findings add to a growing list of failures by governments to act to protect nurses and other health workers during the pandemic. By not collecting data on deaths and infections or recognising COVID-19 as an occupational disease, governments are effectively looking the other way. The consequence is that staff are left without equipment, training, testing, mental health or financial support. Make no mistake: by putting staff at risk governments are also putting patients at risk. This ICN

COVID-19 report coincides later this week with World Patient Safety Day which will shine further light on health workforce safety. The simple and undeniable truth is that health workforce safety and patient safety are two sides of the same coin, you cannot have one without the other.”

Commenting on the breadth and depth of the psychological pressures nurses are facing highlighted by the survey, Mr. Catton said, “There is a huge hidden mental health risk to our nursing workforce submerged below the surface of the pandemic. ICN research indicates the real scale of the mental health legacy of COVID-19 will undoubtedly mean that sickness, absenteeism, burnout and nurses leaving the profession because of ill health will increase, making shortages even more severe and resulting in an unquantifiable loss of experience.”

Read the complete ICN findings and recommendations [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.

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