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ICN: ‘Mental health is a human right – end discrimination now’

ICN calls for investment in nursing as an essential prerequisite for high-quality mental health services

Geneva, Switzerland, 10 October 2019 – World Mental Health Day (10.10.2019) is observed each year to raise awareness of mental health issues affecting 1 billion people across the world. Despite effective strategies for managing and preventing mental disorders, many people do not seek help because of limited access to care and the stigma attached.

World Mental Health Day is an opportunity to highlight the invaluable role of registered nurses in promoting mental health, preventing mental illness and providing person-centred mental health care. Nurses are the largest professional group working in mental health.

Mental illness affects people of all ages, genders, socioeconomic levels and in every corner of the globe. And yet, around the world, mental health services are often plagued by stigma and discrimination and, as a result, end up underfunded and inaccessible to people who are in dire need.

This year’s focus on suicide prevention is especially welcome because of the high number of suicides across the globe. The World Health Organization estimates that as many as 800,000 people take their own lives each year - one every 40 seconds - a truly staggering and alarming statistic.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

‘Health is a human right and that right should apply equally to physical and mental health problems. Mental health services have historically been poorly funded and given a low priority, which means that the one in four of the population who will experience a mental health issue either have to wait far too long for help, treatment and support, or do not get any help at all.

‘The impact of not getting proper, timely treatment puts enormous pressure on individuals, their families and friends, and can quickly lead to people facing a number of issues, including social

isolation, problems at work, and financial difficulties. People with mental illness often have limited or no access to housing, education or employment.

‘This lack of mental health services is a form of discrimination that can result in violations of people’s basic human rights, and it must end. We all need to talk more about mental health, and governments must invest more in services and the nurses that make them run smoothly. Nurses act as patient advocates and play an essential role in preventing and eliminating abuse and poor treatment of people with mental illness.’

ICN is concerned about the pervasiveness of the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and its negative consequences on the wellbeing of patients, families and society in general. The focus for the future development of mental health services should be on fully integrated services that are embedded in local communities to provide the best care as close to home as possible.

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Note to Editors

People with mental health problems are three times more likely to develop debilitating non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke. The impact of mental illness on the social and economic well-being of individuals, families, and societies is large, underestimated, and often ignored. If untreated, mental illness undermines health capital, and hence human capital development, since they, unlike many of the high-burden diseases, have an early age of onset and are highly prevalent in the working-age population. In OECD countries mental illness affects an estimated 20 per cent of the working-age population at any given time. According to the world Bank the global economy loses about \$1 trillion every year in productivity due to depression and anxiety.

It is estimated that the world spends 2% of the global health budget on mental health. It is believed that if investment was made into treatment interventions at the community level, there would be significant economic returns. The benefit-to-cost ratios for depression equated to approximately two and a half times and for anxiety disorders up to three times the benefit.

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurse 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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ICN/PR2019 #47