



Virtual events cast spotlight on powerful role of women and nurses, and need for more testing during COVID-19 pandemic

Geneva, Switzerland; 26 June 2020 — Annette Kennedy, President of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), along with other women political leaders, has called for an increase in the amount and affordability of testing of the virus that causes COVID-19.

They were speaking at a webinar on 22 June, entitled “Test to Exit COVID-19 – Engaging women political leaders as champions for testing”, which was organised by The G20 Health and Development Partnership, Women Political Leaders (WPL) and the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND). Bringing together over 200 ministers and healthcare professionals from over 20 countries, the webinar featured powerful women leaders including:

- Annette Kennedy, President, ICN
- Aminata Touré, Former Prime Minister of Senegal
- Gro Harlem Brundtland, Former Prime Minister of Norway & Former Director General of the WHO
- H.E. Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil, Social Affairs Commissioner African Union
- Dr. Catharina Boehme, CEO, FIND
- Silvana Koch-Mehrin, President & Founder, WPL
- Hatice Küçük, Executive Director, The G20 Health and Development Partnership

Ms Kennedy stressed the need to ensure health workers have access to testing, saying, “If you don’t protect the people who are delivering the care, you won’t have a health service. I’m tired about hearing about the economy, you won’t have any economy if you don’t have healthy people.”

The ICN President was also a panelist on the 23 June United Nations Public Service Day online event held to honour the work of public servants during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The panel discussion brought together representatives from WHO and cities/countries that have been particularly badly hit by the pandemic and focused on governance responses to the crisis and the role of frontline public servants.

Ms Kennedy told the high-level panel that there was still a serious problem of inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE) for nurses in many countries, with a lack of equipment or sometimes ill-fitting equipment which was useless, as well as lack of testing. She brought attention to the need for systematic tracking and reporting infection rates and deaths amongst healthcare workers to WHO, in order to take preventative measures. Finally, she highlighted the grave issue of violence against nurses, citing incidences of abuse including spitting, chlorine being thrown at nurses and recently in Mexico kidnapping and extortion.

The event featured

- Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General, UN (video statement)
- Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, President, UN General Assembly

- H.E. Ms. Sahle-Work Zewde, President, Ethiopia
- Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General, World Health Organization
- Mr. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs
- H.E. Mr. Chin Young, Minister of Interior and Safety, Republic of Korea
- Dr. In-Jae Lee, Assistant Minister of the Interior and Safety, Republic of Korea
- H.E. Ms. K.K. Shailaja Teacher, Minister of Health of Kerala State, India
- Ms. Annette Kennedy, President, ICN
- Mr. Jim Campbell, Director, Health Workforce Division, WHO
- Ms. Rosa Pavenelli, General Secretary, Public Services International

ICN and Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma) held an online event on 23 June, moderated by ICN and entitled “Nursing: A Pathway to Empowerment for Women”. Exploring how women can achieve economic empowerment through a nursing education and career and be leaders for social justice and equity, the webinar featured presentations by ICN Board members, Lisa Little and Pamela Cipriano and featured personal stories of two nurses, one from Gambia and one from Argentina, who have been empowered through nursing.

Ms. Little spoke on how ICN is working to advance the profession, saying that the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife (YONM) and the COVID-19 response both highlight the contribution nursing can make to the empowerment of women. In particular, the COVID-19 response during the YONM has highlighted the critical role of nursing in any public health response, and the need for nurses to have proper support and personal protective equipment (PPE). ICN’s comprehensive media strategy for the YONM and COVID-19 has shown the power of media in highlighting the critical role of nursing and women to the public and to governments.

Speaking about the social, political and economic empowerment achieved through nursing, Dr Cipriano said that political empowerment of nurses is most important, saying “we need to make sure we actively engage all the work we do to really have influence at the highest levels of our countries.” She highlighted the need to act individually and collectively to change relationships to ensure equality and gender equity, and spoke about the issues of racism that have come to the forefront in the US and around the world, saying “nurses are bound by their codes of ethics and this is one of the roots of social empowerment.” She stressed the importance of raising nurses’ voice and influence, saying “We must prepare nurses to be able to speak, to be able to influence our countries at every level.”

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