



ICN CEO says the world is in danger of losing its moral compass by not urgently prioritising nurses and other healthcare workers for COVID-19 vaccinations

Geneva, 21 July 2021 - On Wednesday July 21, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton was [interviewed](#) about prioritising vaccinations for nurses and other healthcare workers on the BBC World Service programme Newsday.

Mr Catton was asked about the millions of healthcare workers around the world who remain unvaccinated.

He said that although many countries have committed to prioritising healthcare workers, in many places it has not happened.

Mr Catton said that according to the World Health Organization (WHO), about one eighth of the world's 135 million healthcare workers have still not been fully vaccinated, the overwhelming majority of them in low- and low-middle-income countries.

Countries in Africa, for example, need about 66 million doses of the vaccine to double jab all their nurses and healthcare workers. Mr Catton said that they are being left behind.

“Today, nurses will be going to work in some countries knowing that they are high risk, but unvaccinated. And at the same time, in richer countries, they see unlocking, they see less vulnerable younger people getting the vaccine, people being able to go and sit on beaches for their holidays because they've been double jabbed, while they are still waiting. And they feel dispensable and disposable.”

Asked whether this was a matter of vaccine supply rather than healthcare workers not being put at the front of the list, Mr Catton said:

“There is a fundamental problem with a lack of supply and not enough going into some of those countries. We have had reports that nurses have queued overnight, waiting to try and get a jab, but still then waiting for their second one. This is at the same time as some countries are now talking to manufacturers about ‘booster’ third doses for their populations. So there is a supply issue, but there is a sharing issue as well. Despite the commitments that we heard recently from the G7, I've still not seen, and I don't know what the plan is to deliver on the commitment to prioritise all healthcare workers. I sit and watch the news and see that there are billionaires building rockets to send people into space, but we still can't vaccinate all of our healthcare workers. It feels like we've lost our moral compass on this.”

Asked about the ethical issue of some countries considering vaccinating 12-to-18-year-olds ahead of the world's healthcare workers, Mr Catton said:

“I believe that there is the ethical argument [for vaccinating healthcare workers first]. But I also believe there is a clear health and economic argument as well. We know how interconnected the world is, we know that the virus is mutating. The best way to close this down will be to vaccinate the world. It's not a country race, it's a global race. We also know that we need to protect our health systems, and if nurses aren't being vaccinated in countries with already weak health systems, it puts them at risk as well. Do people want to live in a future world

where their borders are closed, and they can just go about their livelihoods within their national boundaries? Because if we don't defeat this virus on a global scale, then that's the sort of future world that we're looking at.”

For more than a year ICN has been calling on governments to keep standardised and systematic records of the number of nurses who have become ill with or died from COVID-19. In May 2021, WHO announced that at least 115,000 healthcare workers have died from the virus during the pandemic.

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