



ICN gives full support to WISH/WHO report calling for more action to protect mental health of nurses and other health workers

Geneva, Switzerland; 06 October 2022 - The negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of nurses and other healthcare workers have been underscored in a new report from the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The report, on which International Council of Nurses (ICN) CEO Howard Catton was an advisor, says there had been a failure to protect the mental health and wellbeing of health and care workers, and that at least a quarter of them have reported anxiety, depression and the symptoms of burnout.

Speaking at the launch of the [Our duty of care: A global call to action to protect the mental health of health and care workers](#) report, at the WISH conference in Doha, Qatar, Mr Catton said the public had realised the value of nurses during pandemic but politicians were less willing to turn praise into investment:

“There is a historic lack of value of nursing. Politicians make the case about investing in economy, infrastructure, technologies, but you never hear that about nursing, the profession is both an under and devalued currency. Nurses need to have decent safe conditions at work and that includes mental health support, they must feel valued and recognised that they do make a difference. They want their voice to be heard by employers and governments and yes to receive fair remuneration for their expertise and dedication.”

Mr Catton reflected that in the overwhelming majority of countries nurses are paid at or below the average wage for the economy as a whole:

“Are nurses really the average worker and what does paying them at that level or below say about how we really value them? The world’s nurses deserve a pay rise for the sake of all our health.”

The ICN CEO emphasised that health included both physical and mental health, and that the mental health of nurses had been profoundly adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic:

“We have been talking to nurses since the start of the pandemic and their mental health has been a concern from day one. I have been struck by the complexity of the issues: stress and burnout of course, but we have also seen nurses abused and attacked, and being confronted by anti-vaxxers saying “COVID’s fake, it’s not real,” just after they have been dealing with the cold hard realities of the pandemic.

‘The intensity of the pandemic was quite different from what nurses were used to as many nurses had to step into the shoes of the loved ones of the dying during their last moments. This was a mass traumatising of the nursing workforce, and it has taken its toll.’

The report highlights ten policy actions that WISH and WHO says should be taken up immediately, including investing in workplace environments and cultures that prevent burnout, promote staff wellbeing, and support quality care.

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