

World AIDS Day

Defeating any virus is simply not possible without nurses

Geneva, Switzerland, 1 December 2020

– On World AIDS Day, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) recognises and applauds the remarkable contributions of nurses and midwives to the HIV epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic. To continue this valuable work, ICN is calling for three key actions:

1. **Protect the nursing workforce.** Governments must collect and analyse data on infections and deaths among nurses; recognise COVID-19 as an occupational disease; ensure the availability of PPE; and have zero tolerance for discrimination and violence. They must also ensure that the mental health of nurses is supported.

2. **Invest in nursing education and jobs.** According to the *State of the World's Nursing* report, at least six million new nursing jobs must be created by 2030 to offset the projected shortages and redress the inequitable distribution of nurses across the world. The report also calls for investment in nursing education to address global needs, meet domestic demands and respond to changing technologies and advancing models of health and social care.¹

3. **Strengthen nurse leadership** to ensure that nurses are influencing policy and decision-making. It is only with strong nursing leadership that we will build the future of healthcare beyond COVID-19.

Earlier this year, ICN accepted the International AIDS Society's (IAS) Presidential Award on behalf of the world's nurses. The award recognises nurses' "courage, selflessness and stoicism" in fighting AIDS and COVID-19.

On receiving the award, ICN President Annette Kennedy said:



¹ World Health Organization (2020) *State of the World's Nursing: Investing in education, jobs and leadership*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003279>

“From the outset, nurses have been intimately involved in the care of people with HIV and have always been at their side during the difficult battles they have fought....nursing care has always been a central pillar that supports all other efforts to enable people living with HIV to live dignified, happy, and fulfilled lives....The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that the lessons learned in the early days of AIDS are just as valid today, and this award will give a boost to the millions of nurses worldwide who are again engaged in a fight to stem the tide of a dangerous and highly contagious virus.”

ICN Chief Executive Officer, Howard Catton said:

“This is a timely reminder that when you look at infectious diseases that the world has faced – AIDS, Ebola, TB, and currently coronavirus – it is nurses that you find at every stage of care from prevention through to palliative care. And importantly, it is also nurses who are improving access to care for those that need it. Defeating any virus is simply not possible without nurses.”

Erica Burton, ICN Senior Nursing Advisor, spoke at a webinar to celebrate World AIDS Day today along with other notable speakers, including Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General; Peter Sands, Executive Director, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV (UNAIDS).

Ms Burton pointed out the many similarities between the HIV epidemic and COVID-19 pandemic in terms of feelings of stigma, discrimination, misinformation, distrust, fear, loss and grief.

She said: “The majority of care delivered to people with HIV is by nurses, as it is with COVID-19. Throughout history, nurses have been at the forefront of caring and advocating for people who are disempowered and marginalised....As the largest group of healthcare professionals and those closest to people and communities, nurses are essential to reaching the most vulnerable people who are in need of life-saving prevention, testing and treatment services.”

Read the full press release on the IAS Award [here](#) and watch Howard Catton’s acceptance video [here](#).

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