International Council of Nurses
20th Asia Workforce Forum
21-22 November 2019

ICN AWFF Communiqué

1. Nursing leaders representing eight million nurses from 11 National Nurses Associations across Asia[i] participated in the 20th Asia Workforce Forum (AWFF) co-hosted by International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the Korean Nurses Association, held in Seoul, Korea, 21-22 November 2019.

2. The Forum was convened in the knowledge that 2020 has been designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the Year of the Nurse and of the Midwife. This will be marked by the publication of the first global report on "The State of the World's Nursing", which is currently being developed with participation of ICN, NNAs and other stakeholders in many countries. One key focus for the Forum was to assess progress with the report and discuss enhanced contributions to ensure its accuracy and completeness.

3. The main reason that the significance of nurses will be highlighted in 2020 is that they are central to achieving sustained improvements in population health. Nurses are present in all parts of the health system, notably in primary care. All countries have committed to progressing towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which means that all individuals and communities can receive the health services they need. Nurses have been recognised by WHO as being critical enablers to achieving UHC. In recognition of this unprecedented global focus on the nursing workforce, the Asia Workforce Forum (AWFF) reviewed and verified the challenges faced by the nursing workforce to support the achievement of UHC, and explored strategies for cooperation among countries.

4. The starting point of this assessment was the recognition that WHO has estimated a shortage of approximately nine million nurses worldwide, with some of the worst

affected countries being in Asia. Participants at the Forum reported that all countries and regions still face difficulties due to the lack of nurses. In order to address these shortages of nurses, there is an urgent need for improved funding of nurses, including education, wages and working conditions for the nursing workforce. In particular, it is important not only to expand quantitatively, but also to equip registered nurses with the appropriate skills and qualifications that meet priority population health needs. This is an investment not an expenditure which will have a multiple payback in terms of supporting the achievement of UHC, generating a return on investment through economic growth, and supporting social development through access to improved education and career opportunities[ii].

5. Participants agreed that securing sufficient and well qualified nurses is a critical step in achieving effective health services and UHC. In poor working conditions, the turnover rate of nurses increases, and as a result, the quality of care deteriorates, leading to poor patient outcomes. This in turn can lead to a vicious cycle of worsening nurses' working environment. Strategies for improving retention for nurses, such as provision of safe and flexible working environment, elimination of workplace harassment, valuing recognition and respect for the nursing workforce, and securing fair wage and competitive employment conditions for nurses must be urgently developed and implemented.

6. The Forum agreed that all NNA's must work with other stakeholders to advance career development and professionalism of nurses by securing, recognizing and rewarding excellence in nursing practice. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is the most effective way to retain competent nurses for patient-centered care.

7. In many countries, nurses are increasingly performing specialized and advanced roles in a range of specialties and locations, reflecting growing recognition from governments and health policy makers that they are safe and cost-effective solutions to changing population health priorities, to improving access to health care, and to leading the development of improved primary health care delivery. For example, some countries are expanding the use of Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs), who play a leading role in caring for patients with chronic diseases in primary healthcare system, and are extending the ability of APNs to prescribe and manage medication, which evidence shows they can do safely and cost-effectively. However, it was reported at the Forum that in some countries outmoded attitudes toward nurses are still prevalent; such stereotypes are a major obstacle to enabling the nursing

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profession to make its optimum contribution to achieving UHC. The participating NNAs agreed on the need to work with other stakeholders, including politicians, the media and civil society, to further develop the evidence, advocate and make the case for a positive, modern view of nurses , and for the central role they can and must play in delivering safe and effective care, including at an advanced practice level..

8. The Forum also agreed that it is critical that senior nurses are fully involved in the policy-making process within their countries, and internationally, in order to ensure that the central role of the nursing workforce is fully represented, including focusing on identified priorities related to improving recognition of the nursing profession, expanding nurses' roles and advanced practice, securing educational programmes that reflect population health priorities, and retaining experienced nurses in the workforce . Nursing leaders also must be fully engaged in maintaining consistency of national nursing workforce policies, plans, regulations, and management; only then can nurses participate fully in, and influence, health policy decision-making processes. This includes the specific point that each country and government must establish the position of Chief Nursing Officer which can play a key role in reflecting the voice of nurses and in focusing on recognition and development of the nursing profession.

9. The Forum participants agreed that young nurses and nursing students should be actively involved in decision-making processes in order to foster future leaders. Participants discussed how best to support future generations through ongoing mentoring programs or support programs, in order to make it possible for young people to choose the nursing profession as their lifelong career.

10. There was an agreed consensus at the Forum about the need to consider the curriculum of nursing colleges in order to ensure that these met population health priorities, and were also developed and aligned to maximise the linkage to the current digital medical environment, including to actively utilize e-learning systems for nursing education.

11. As noted, the State of World's Nursing Report (SoWN), is scheduled to be released on 7 April next year. The intention is that it will provide a global and country level analysis of the current profile of the professions, its main challenges, and its value to population health and attaining UHC. This analysis will have the potential to be a driving force in stimulating investment in nurses through policy-making activities. As such, the Forum agreed that it is essential for the report to be based on accurate

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data and discussed concerns about a risk that critical nursing workforce data reported for some countries may be inaccurate. As such the NNAs pledged to make vigorous commitment in working closely with their own governments, to ensure this data is accurate, complete and up to date. The Forum also agreed that SoWN must become a regular report, published in future years, not a "one off". Only if it becomes a regular report can the full benefits of the analysis be realised, through tracking progress, and evaluating the effect of policies, and the value and contribution of nurses to UHC be fully achieved.

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[i] Chinese Nursing Association, College of Nursing Hong Kong, Indonesian National Nurses Association, Japanese Nursing Association, Nurses Association of Macau, Malaysian Nurses Association, Philippine Nurses Association, Singapore Nurses Association, Taiwan Nurses Association, Nurses Association of Thailand and Korean Nurses Association

[ii] Reference UN High Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth