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ICN confirms 1,500 nurses have died from COVID-19 in 44 countries and estimates that healthcare worker COVID-19 fatalities worldwide could be more than 20,000

Geneva, Switzerland, 28 October 2020 – The International Council of Nurses' latest analysis shows that the number of nurses who have died after contracting COVID-19 is 1,500, up from 1,097 in August. The figure, which includes nurses from only 44 of the world's 195 countries, is known to be an underestimate of the true numbers of deaths.

ICN's own analysis suggests that about 10% of cases globally are among healthcare workers.

As of this week there are more than 43 million cases worldwide with approximately 2.6% of those, 1.1 million, resulting in deaths.

Even if the case fatality ratio among the more than four million healthcare workers infected is only 0.5%, in excess of 20,000 healthcare workers could have died from the virus.

Speaking during the Nightingale 2020 virtual conference on October 27-28, ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said:

“The fact that as many nurses have died during this pandemic as died during World War I is shocking. Since May 2020 we have been calling for the standardised and systematic collection of data on healthcare worker infections and deaths, and the fact that it is still not happening is a scandal.

‘2020 is the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, and the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth, and I am sure she would have been immensely saddened and angry about this lack of data - I know I am.

‘Florence demonstrated during the Crimean War how the collection and analysis of data can improve our understanding of risks to health, improve clinical practices and save lives, and that includes nurses and healthcare workers. If she were alive today, world leaders would have her voice ringing in their ears saying they must protect our nurses. There is a chasm between the warm words and accolades, and the action that needs to be taken.’

Speaking after the event Mr Catton said that the pandemic has shown how interconnected the world has become, and that government responses need to recognise that and respond appropriately.

“I genuinely believe that global has never been more local in terms of the challenges we are facing, the lessons we need to learn and the solutions we seek. For example, getting personal protective equipment across borders requires governments to work together on customs and control issues, and when we have a vaccine, getting it to everybody who needs it, rather than just those who can afford to pay for it, will require multilateralism and cooperation.

‘Nurses will have a major role to play in what comes after COVID. Our experience and the data we have means we have a very powerful and legitimate voice that we must use to influence health systems of the future.’

Commenting on reports of demonstrations and strikes by some nurses in Europe over the handling of the pandemic, Mr Catton said:

‘I’m not surprised that we are at this point because we went into this pandemic so badly prepared, with a lack of investment, six million nurses short and some governments’ slowness to respond appropriately.

‘This is a major lesson for the future. When this is over, we must never take our health systems for granted again, and we must invest much more heavily in them and our health workers.

‘Nurses are angry about the lack of preparedness, but they are also angry about the lack of support that they have received.

‘We need to move on from the warm words into real action, because none of us are going to cope and our economies won’t recover if we don’t keep our healthcare workers and nurses working and able to look after all of us.’

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Note to Editors

The **International Council of Nurses** (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

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