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## **ICN says 115,000 healthcare worker deaths from COVID-19 exposes collective failure of leaders to protect global workforce**

**Geneva, Switzerland, 21 October 2021** – Newly released data from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests 115,000 healthcare workers died from COVID-19 between January 2020 and May 2021. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) calls the number of deaths a damning indictment of governments for their failure to fulfil their duty of care to protect their most vital workforce. WHO were informed by governments of less than 7,000 COVID-related healthcare worker deaths during that period, which WHO then analysed with the support of other organisations including ICN. This analysis arrived at the estimate of 115,000 globally, which ICN warns is a conservative estimate of the true number of healthcare worker deaths.

ICN President Annette Kennedy said: “For many months, ICN’s analysis of information from our National Nursing Association members on nurse infections and deaths was one of the only sources of data available. ICN has been pushing governments to collect this data and send it to WHO for more than a year, but many did not. Seeing the figures in print, confirmation that more than 115,000 healthcare workers have died, many of them nurses, is terrible, especially as we know that the final figure is likely to be higher still.”

Ms Kennedy added that COVID-19 is having a devastating effect on the nursing workforce and has brought the world to the brink of a global nursing crisis.

“We know all about the six million nurse gap that existed just before the pandemic struck. But COVID-19 has compounded the problems, and we are now seeing signs of an all too understandable exodus from the profession, at the time when all the evidence is pointing to a 13 million nurse shortfall by 2030. We need to see a concerted global effort to address this issue before it is too late – because otherwise community health services will disappear, and hospitals with no nurses will end up being simply buildings for the sick.”

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton, who was a technical adviser on the WHO analysis of the healthcare worker data, said the fact that governments have not been providing readily available and centrally collated data on healthcare worker infections and deaths since the start of the pandemic is disgraceful.

“It is appalling that governments are still not systematically collecting standardised data on healthcare worker infections and deaths. During the period covered by this report, governments reported to WHO that there were fewer than 7,000 deaths among healthcare workers, when we know the true figure is many times that. Frankly, it shows that they were not taking the issue seriously.

“Where is the moral outrage at the deaths of the tens of thousands of healthcare staff who have died from an illness they should have been protected from? Sadly, the old saying that the death of one person is a tragedy but the death of thousands a mere statistic rings horribly true when it comes to our nurses. They and their colleagues were just doing their jobs, and yet they ended up paying the ultimate sacrifice.”

For more information see: <https://www.who.int/news/item/20-10-2021-health-and-care-worker-deaths-during-covid-19>

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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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