



International Council of Nurses
The global voice of nursing

Press Information . Communiqué de presse . Comunicado de prensa

ICN backs Switzerland's nursing initiative 'YES' vote that aims to address shortages and improve safety & quality of care



Geneva, Switzerland, 25 November 2021 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is backing Switzerland's nurses in their attempt to address nursing shortages, and improve safety and quality of care through a popular vote, and calling on more countries to give their people a say on the value and future of nursing.

ICN Chief Executive Officer Howard Catton said the Swiss vote is of great international significance because the conditions that brought it about are widely shared around the world. They include dire nursing shortages, which are affecting patient safety and the health and well-being of nurses, a lack of recognition for the value of nurses to societies, stagnant or falling pay in real terms and a lack of career opportunities.

Mr Catton said:

“Nurses around the world feel ignored. They are exhausted from the ongoing response to the pandemic, and tired of political platitudes in the absence of any real action and

investment in nursing. As a result, we are increasingly seeing demonstrations, disputes and industrial action on the one hand, and a worrying increase in number of nurses leaving the profession on the other.

'ICN supports the nurses of Switzerland who are using their country's referendum system to directly ask the people what they are worth. They are saying "Let the people decide" because they believe the people know the true value of nursing. The public know that if there are not enough nurses their loved ones and family members will have to step in to provide care. The quality of their own care of their loved ones will also be hampered.

'The pandemic has shown us the frailties and weaknesses in our health systems and our societies but it has also shown us a great sense of solidarity and consensus on what are the most important things in life and what really matters, and that is why the public and healthcare workers coming together has the potential to be a powerful and positive force for change.'

Switzerland's nursing initiative vote, the outcome of which will be decided on Sunday November 28, is about proposals to improve the lot of Switzerland's nurses, including:

- Expanding nurses' responsibilities regarding prescribing in the field of nursing without having to have their decisions countersigned by a doctor.
- Educating more nurses to take up the 11,000 job vacancies in nursing across Switzerland. The country and local cantons need to invest in education, increase numbers and improve payment of the students in order to make nursing education more attractive.
- Retaining nurses and improving working conditions. Currently 4 out of 10 nurses are leaving the profession very early. There is a need for more reliable work schedules, family compatible structures and good opportunities for professional development. Salaries must comply with all the requirements concerning competences and workload.
- The Swiss nursing initiative aims at ensuring that there are enough nurses on all shifts: "A nurse may only be responsible for a maximum number of patients, depending on his or her area. This guarantees quality, patient safety, efficient use of resources and increases job satisfaction and thus the length of time spent in the profession," said the President of the Swiss Nurses Association, (SBK-ASI) Sophie Ley.

President Ley said COVID-19 is putting an extra burden on nurses who are already tired and overworked, increasing the potential for errors that could put patients at risk.

"Nurses have been working at full capacity for a long time and they are on the brink of exhaustion and are leaving the profession because they see no prospects for improvement. COVID-19 has increased the workload of many nurses even more."

The Swiss Nurses Association pointed out that the Swiss government had decided to reject the initiative without any alternative proposals. The Swiss parliament is suggesting a counter proposal, but only focusing at increasing the numbers in education. Any improvements of working conditions or adequate staffing have not been considered.

* * *

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.

For more information please contact Gyorgy Madarasz, Press Officer at madarasz@icn.ch
Tel: +41 22 908 01 16

www.icn.ch