

ICN statement on the need for protection of health care workers against gender-based violence following tragic murder of female doctor in India

16 August 2024 – Following the horrific rape and murder of a female trainee doctor at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) expresses its grave concerns about the increasing levels of gender-based violence against health care workers globally.

Following the tragedy in India, nurses, student nurses and midwives in West Bengal State have joined protests and are supporting a strike by the Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA) calling for swift justice for the victim, as well as for the government to speed up the investigation, impose the most severe penalty to the accused and bring legislation to protect health professionals while on duty. About 30% of doctors and 80% of nurses in India are female.

Dr Pamela Cipriano, ICN President stated:

“ICN sends its condolences and support to our medical colleagues in India. We are shocked and outraged by this tragic news, but unfortunately it is not unprecedented. India has a significant history of gender based violence and attacks on health care workers and we support our colleagues in India in calling for legislation to protect health care workers in the workplace and an end to all gender based violence.

It is the right of every person to work in a safe environment and, as we have stated in our position statement on the [prevention and management of workplace violence](#), we support the development of policies that reflect a ‘zero tolerance’ of violence of any form.”

Howard Catton, ICN CEO, added:

“Globally, gender-based violence against health care workers was a big problem during the COVID-19 pandemic and ICN contributed to a WHO report on [Health workforce policy and management in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response](#) that included a number of references to violence and what health systems should be doing to support, monitor and report.

ICN also lobbied to include the rights of health workers in the 2020 [World Patient Safety Day Charter](#) which underlined the growing threat of violence in health care settings and called on governments and local health service leaders to take

action to better protect health. We backed this up in our position statement on [patient safety](#), saying that patient safety and health workforce safety are inextricably linked and that workforce safety must be integrated and aligned with patient safety strategies and policies.

Since the pandemic, the threat of gender-based violence has not gone away. Health workers must be free from the threat of violence in the workplace. We simply cannot begin to address the global nursing shortage without safe workplaces!”

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