

## ICN President Annette Kennedy tells the world's health community that the way nurses have been treated during the pandemic 'is a disgrace'

**Geneva, Switzerland; 27 October 2021** - ICN President Annette Kennedy [has told the World Health Summit \(WHS\) in Berlin](#) of the unrelenting and unsustainable pressure nurses have been under since the start of the pandemic and called for urgent action to stop an understandable exodus from the profession.

Ms Kennedy, who will be presiding over next week's virtual ICN Congress, gave a stark assessment of the world's lack of preparation for the pandemic, and the lack of protection afforded to the world's nurses, during the WHS which was held earlier this week.



Speaking to an audience of health professionals, scientists, politicians and high-ranking officials at the summit, Ms Kennedy said:

“No country was prepared for the pandemic, despite us knowing for decades that a pandemic would come. No country had resilient health systems, and no country had put strategies in place. After two years, I hope we have learned some lessons.”

She said that prior to the pandemic, nurses were already overworked and overburdened, with a worldwide shortage of six million, and yet despite not being properly protected, they met the COVID-19 pandemic with courage and resilience.

“Nurses worked 12-hour shifts, ten days straight, without breaks, all without protective equipment. That was a disgrace.”

She said ICN's National Nurses Associations around the world have told ICN about the realities on the ground, the shortages, the long hours and the lack of personal protective equipment, the lack of support and the unavailability of COVID-19 vaccinations.

And she said she was sceptical about government plans to train more nurses after an ICN survey showed that three-quarters of countries indicated that they are going to increase their number of nurses.

“I will wait to see that implemented, because it takes three to four years to register a nurse. If we wait to find out that we are heading to a crisis of shortages of nurses it will be too late, like it was for the pandemic.”

Ms Kennedy said nurses have been going home crying because they have too many patients, because they are worried about taking the virus home to their families, and because they are caring for so many patients who are dying without their relatives by their side.

“You don’t get over that,” Ms Kennedy said. “I worked in intensive care for many years, I nursed many patients who died quickly and without warning. And I remember every one of those patients who died, so I can’t imagine what those nurses will be feeling after this is over.”

She said burn out and stress is leading large numbers of nurses to leave the profession, many of whom are very experienced, which will make existing shortages even worse.

Commenting on the World Health Organization report that stated 115,000 healthcare workers have died from COVID-19 between January 2020 and May 2021, Ms Kennedy said:

“Where are the investigations into that? If a plane crashed every day from the start of COVID, you wouldn’t have to wait a week for the aviation industry to be closed down and for investigation after investigation until they found the source and dealt with it.”

She said the pressures on nurses are mounting and many are voting with their feet. In the United States nurses are leaving their jobs to work for agencies because they can make three or four times the money in jobs that give them fewer responsibilities and enough cash to work fewer hours.

In a stark warning Ms Kennedy said: “There will be no health systems without nurses.”

The World Health Summit is a high-profile annual interdisciplinary event and one of the world’s leading strategic forums for global health. The three-day event, 24-26 October, hosted delegates from 100 countries, with the aim of improving health world-wide and strengthening international cooperation.

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