



Message from WHO Representative to India

World Health Day 2020: Supporting nurses and midwives

The 2020 World Health Day is a recognition and an acknowledgement of the critical role that nurses and midwives play in keeping the world healthy. It also celebrates their contribution in bringing hope, warmth, compassion and personalised care to communities across the world. They bring home health.

The World Health Organization and countries around the world are celebrating the year 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife in honour of the 200th anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birth. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus their heroic efforts as a vital part of the dedicated health force – doctors, clinicians, lab technicians, nurses, attendants - in keeping communities safe and healthy.

Supporting the COVID-19 response

In these times of emergency, we are witnessing how this core cadre of health workers is providing much needed care, notwithstanding the personal risk to save and improve lives of others. They are going beyond their call of duty, be it at the facility they work in or in the field, safeguarding public health. Working closely with the frontline health response teams of doctors and others, they are providing high quality, respectful treatment and care, leading community discourse to address fears and, in many instances collecting data and supporting surveillance and testing. As the burden of COVID-19 on the health systems rises, they remain determined to ensure emergency and routine service delivery at our health facilities and in the community is continued.

Evidence for action

Unprecedented challenges often bring unprecedented opportunity. Their role in emergency preparedness and response as well as continuing essential services throughout the life course has been clearly demonstrated, making a clear evidence-based case for increased investment in the health workforce. WHO has also released the first ever



'State of the World's Nursing Report 2020', which provides a crucial snapshot of nursing worldwide. The report underscores the nursing cadre's vital contribution to Sustainable Development Goals, Universal Health Coverage (UHC), and WHO's "triple billion" targets.

Commitment to investment

India has over two million nurses, midwives and nearly 900 000 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs). Together they form the cornerstone for building a strong and resilient health system needed to achieve UHC and delivering on its promise of accessible health care as close as possible to the communities. In India, they are not only playing a critical role in health promotion but are also pivotal for disease prevention and delivering primary and community care as envisaged under Ayushman Bharat's Health & Wellness Centres. They are often, the first and sometimes the only health professional for people in many communities.

The Government of India has already committed to an additional 85 000 midwives by 2023. In the current emergency, the government has shown extraordinary leadership and commitment in safeguarding and providing an enabling environment to the frontline health workers, including nurses – better insurance coverage, provisioning of personal protective equipment and prophylactic care.

It is important that the commitment is sustained and scaled up to strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce as part of the quest to achieve UHC. We need to complement this with strengthening pre-service education and skill-building so that future nurses/midwives are better prepared for such challenges and their leadership skills honed to enhance participation in key decision-making forums.

Looking forward

Nursing has a universally unifying ethos and the COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the interminable dedication and indomitable spirit of nurses and midwives around the world. We need to continue to advocate for policy dialogue, research and increased investment in the nursing workforce in times to come.

Strengthening nursing workforce will have triple impact - improve health, promote gender equality, and support economic growth. Nursing has been synonymous with caring, but, beyond its time honoured representation for compassion and dedication, it is a specialized profession. We know the benefits, and now we must work together to raise the discourse on nursing in the health sector.

As the world marks the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife, we must celebrate, support and strengthen the nursing and midwifery workforce in India. Let us all come together to show our appreciation and gratitude for their work and thank them for all that they do to keep us healthy and live in a happier world.

