25 August 2000

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WHO
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WHO PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the UK’s largest professional association and trade union for nurses, with over 320,000 members. Most RCN members work in the NHS, with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a major contributor to the development of nursing practice, standards of care and health policy.

The RCN is actively involved with WHO – Europe and with the European Network for Smoking Prevention in developing nursing skills in smoking cessation and sharing expertise. As there are wide variations in the resources allocated to smoking cessation activities between different countries, it is essential for smoking cessation skills and expertise to be shared.

The Government’s White Paper, ‘Smoking Kills’, makes proposals aimed at helping people give up smoking and preventing them from starting in the first place. Smoking remains the single biggest avoidable cause of death in the UK. 80% of healthcare is nursing so it is nurses who are at the forefront of caring for people who suffer from the devastating effects of smoking. The ambitious Government targets on tobacco control and smoking cessation cannot be met unless the nursing profession is able to respond in a positive and effective way. Major investment in training is essential if nurses are to fulfil their potential in terms of smoking cessation skills.

Nurses wholeheartedly support the framework convention as this would be the single most effective public health measure in the battle against the present horrendous mortality and morbidity rates caused by tobacco. Collaborative action must focus on reducing the world – wide preventable burden of smoking related death and disease.
Nurses remain key to providing the individual and group help and support that is required to achieve the Government's targets. Throughout the world, nurses have access to the population at all levels and in all settings – hospital, community and workplace. They therefore should be at the forefront of tobacco control, mainly on account of their accessibility to the public, but also because the nursing profession generally enjoys a high degree of public trust.

Research shows that a team approach is very effective. If we look within the (UK there are about 400,000 nurses in post) and across Europe, six million with huge potential at present untapped. The framework convention for tobacco control provides nurses’ groups with an excellent opportunity to become active participants in the UK and international tobacco control movement.

In order for nurses to fulfil their potential, they need the following:

- They must be included in the steering, planning and alliance groups, facilitating them to work in partnership with other professionals involved in tobacco control.

- Comprehensive training programmes for Nurses & Midwives to improve communication skills on raising the issue of smoking.

- The provision of education materials and patient materials to back up the ‘Stop smoking’ messages.

- Systems to enable examples of good practice to be shared between countries.

- Support to help nurses who smoke to stop which can be developed and shared.

The RCN wholeheartedly supports the WHO framework convention on tobacco control. At the moment nurses are in the unenviable position of caring for profoundly sick and disabled people while the battle between powerful tobacco companies and governments continues unabated.

The RCN calls for an end to the freedom enjoyed by the tobacco industry.

Yours sincerely

Christine Hancock

General Secretary