Managing and protecting healthcare workers during the pandemic

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Investment in nursing: education, jobs and leadership
Keeping our healthcare workforce safe

ICN Call to Action

COVID-19

1. Urgently prioritise ready access to sufficient quantity of high-quality and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for nurses and other healthcare workers.

Governments must ensure that production of such equipment is rapidly expanded to meet the demands of the pandemic and optimise supply chains by the rapid production of such materials. Manufacturers and businesses that are capable of scaling up should be invited and rapidly scale up production of or assist manufacturing lines to turn out medical products such as PPE.

Using their professional judgement, within the context of national/international evidence-based guidelines, nurses are best placed to select the appropriate PPE required, based on their assessment of the situation in which they are providing care. The application of practices and procedures should include a post-care risk assessment by the healthcare worker.

2. Ensure all nurses have appropriate evidence-based infection prevention and control training and the latest COVID-19-specific guidance and training.

All healthcare workers must have access to infection prevention and control (IPC) training which should include: a) the role and responsibilities of IPC staff; b) the importance of IPC in the control of infection; c) IPC best practice, including the correct use of PPE; d) proper safe disposal of waste; and e) the importance of IPC in reducing the risk of patient-to-patient transmission. This must be communicated to nurses in an appropriate and timely manner.

Working in a pandemic may pose additional challenges and nurses should be provided with ethical guidelines and procedural values frameworks to help guide decision-making.

3. Protect the health and wellbeing of nurses and other healthcare workers.

Nurses are the largest group of frontline health professionals in the battle against COVID-19. Their safety and wellbeing should be a priority for governments and healthcare organisations. Strategies must be developed and implemented to reduce the physical and psychological burden on nurses.

Governments should provide access to mental health and counselling resources. Employers must monitor and mitigate stress by ensuring appropriate ratios between staff and maintaining scheduled breaks while on shift.

Protecting nurses from COVID-19 a top priority: A survey of ICN’s national nursing associations

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