

## **Royal College of Nursing response to the World Health Organisation's High-Level Commission on Health, Employment and Economic Growth**

### **Introduction**

With a membership of around 430,000 registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, the UK parliaments and other national, international and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

### **Background**

The purpose of this commission is to collect evidence and encourage policy dialogue around the creation of new jobs and investment in the health and social sector. Nursing trade unions and professional associations have a key role to play in promoting decent work, founded on safe and productive working environments, and recognition of the valuable skills that nursing staff bring to make a difference to patients and public health and well-being.

The RCN is pleased that this commission is arguing that investment in the health sector should be seen as a critical generator of economic wealth. We feel that this builds strongly on the WHO's recent strategy on investing in Human Resources for Health, as well as WHO Europe's Strategic Directions for Nursing & Midwifery 2016-2020 and the UK parliament's consultation on how it can better support the global development of nursing.

The RCN responded to both of these initiatives with robust evidence showing that investment in the global health workforce, and in particular nurses and midwives, delivers positive economic, social and demographic results. In this response we have revisited a few of these themes with additional evidence and case studies.

Our response to the WHO's Human Resources for Health strategy can be accessed here: [https://www2.rcn.org.uk/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/639166/43.15-Global-Strategy-on-Human-Resources-for-Health.pdf](https://www2.rcn.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/639166/43.15-Global-Strategy-on-Human-Resources-for-Health.pdf)

Our response to WHO Europe's Strategic Directions (2016-2020) for Nursing & Midwifery can be accessed here: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/about-us/policy-briefings/contr-7415>

Our response to the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health's Review of Nursing can be accessed here: <http://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/consultations>

## General Comments

This response does not cover all of the questions posed by the commission. Instead, we have provided a few key headline recommendations on what we believe the commission should prioritise. Each of our recommendations has a number of links to key evidence sources to support our views.

## Main response

**Investment in health and social care must include growing the nursing workforce.** Nursing represents the vast majority of all health care professionals and demand for nurses is growing across the world. According to the World Bank, there was a shortage of 2.4 million nurses in 2012 and this trend is only likely to worsen with Europe expecting a nursing shortage of nearly 600,000 by 2020, while in the US this figure is expected to reach 800,000. We believe that it makes sense to focus investment to address this imbalance, with the potential for millions of new nursing jobs. Doing this will not only support economic growth and job creation, it will also empower women in countries where opportunities for them to join the skilled labour force are limited, enabling them to attain a higher level of education and a professional career.

Link: [https://www2.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/629530/International-Recruitment-2015.pdf](https://www2.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/629530/International-Recruitment-2015.pdf)

**Investing in career structures and other retention initiatives for nurses is vital in delivering universal health coverage and supporting patients to be active, both socially and economically.** Compounding the challenge of a global nurse shortage, the current workforce is rapidly ageing and many countries are struggling to attract a younger generation to replace them. As a result, the RCN would advise that this initiative prioritise investment in healthy workplaces to help retain existing staff and attract new nurses. The RCN defines 'health workplaces' as those which offer fair pay and rewards and have high quality employment practices and procedures which promote a good work-life balance. We have collected evidence which shows that the creation of health workplaces is an excellent way to ensure a happy, productive and sustainable workforce.

This can be accessed here:

[https://www2.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/643475/Evidence.pdf](https://www2.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/643475/Evidence.pdf)

**Nursing plays an absolutely critical role in supporting people to be healthy, active members of society throughout the life-cycle.** The global rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and a rapidly ageing patient demographic has presented a stark economic challenge to health systems around the world. Nursing is a vital asset for addressing this challenge. This includes:

- Supporting the development of infants from conception all the way through to adulthood. An increasing body of evidence has been compiled about the central role of health visitors (as they're referred to in the UK) in working with parents and families, building trusting relationships and facilitating behaviour and lifestyle changes for the benefit of babies and children as they move into adulthood.

More information on the role of nurses in supporting early years can be found here: [https://www2.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/391837/004125.pdf](https://www2.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/391837/004125.pdf)

- Rehabilitating older patients so that they are able to maintain as much independence as possible and, wherever feasible, to stay out of acute settings which can be unnecessarily expensive. This is achievable because nurses often act as educators to help patients manage their conditions, enabling them to pursue economically and socially active lives.

More information on the role of nurses in supporting older patient's self-care can be found here:

[https://www2.rcn.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/109326/003186.pdf](https://www2.rcn.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/109326/003186.pdf)

**Investments in nursing delivers value for money.** Independent research (currently unpublished) indicates that increasing the number of registered nurses where there is an undersupply is likely to be a cost effective use of financial resources. This research used panel analysis and health economic modelling. It found that increasing registered nurses led to an incremental cost-effectiveness ratio of £10,539 per quality adjusted life year (QALY). To put this into perspective, the UK's National Institute for Care Excellence (NICE) – the body which publishes guidance on the use of new treatments, medicines and practices – accepts as “cost-effective” those interventions with a ratio of less than £20,000 per QALY. As a result, this research indicates that investing in a strong nursing workforce is highly cost effective. We will aim to make this research available to the WHO once it has been peer reviewed and published.

**Investment in advanced nursing practice bolsters innovation and more cost-effective methods of care.** The RCN has collected a large number of case studies

from within the UK. These provide robust economic assessment of the value of nurse-led innovation in practice.

These can be accessed here:

<https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/research-and-innovation/innovation-in-nursing/building-nursing-capability-in-economic-assessment>

In addition, the RCN has also collected a number of international case studies which illustrate the positive contribution which advanced nursing practice makes both to patient outcomes and to expanding universal health coverage.

These can be accessed here: <http://www.rcn.org.uk/get-involved/consultations>

**Nursing is a vital asset in protecting public health. Without this, economic growth and job creation are at serious risk.** Nursing is at the heart of minimising the impact of illness, promoting health and helping people to function at home, work, and leisure. As such, the RCN believes that improving public health should be seen as part of all nursing and midwifery roles. The RCN report, 'Nurses 4 Public Health' brings together case studies from across the UK and care settings. These illustrate the contribution of nursing to public health in the UK.

These case studies can be accessed here: <https://www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/public-health>

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