WHO five-year plan

THE WORLD Health Organization (WHO) has launched a five-year framework for nursing and midwifery services.

It says the contribution of the two professions is being undermined by poor working conditions, staff shortages, migration, poor distribution and inappropriate use of skills.

‘Failure to address these issues will have increasingly serious implications on the accessibility and quality of health care, the well-being of health practitioners and the ability to achieve global and national health priorities,’ the WHO report says.

Launching the Strategic Directions for Strengthening Nursing and Midwifery Services report at the ICN conference in Geneva last week, WHO senior nursing and midwifery scientist Naeema Al-Gasseer said the organisation was searching for solutions to the challenges nurses face. ‘Nurses have demonstrated they are in the front line in emerging illnesses and have been ready to sacrifice their lives. We are increasingly concerned about this and the violence nurses face in the workplace.’

The report covers five key areas: health planning, management of personnel, health system improvement, education and governance. WHO will provide technical advice and support to countries that request assistance in these respects.

Dr Al-Gasseer said the report outlines the way WHO will work to find solutions to improve nurses’ working conditions.

The report can be seen at http://www.who.int/health_topics/nursing/en/

Award for work in war-torn regions

A US nurse academic has won the Florence Nightingale Foundation international achievement award for her work with the world’s most vulnerable communities.

Pictured in Geneva Carol Etherington, assistant professor of nursing at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee has worked in war-torn countries, disaster relief and with refugees

Dedicated and determined leader dies

THE PRESIDENT
of the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO) Clare Spillane (above) has died following a long illness.

Ms Spillane belonged to the INO for nearly 40 years. A spokesperson for the organisation said she was a dedicated and determined leader, championing the role of frontline nurses and midwives.

International Council of Nurses president Christine Hancock said Ms Spillane was ‘a very special nurse’. She was a strong advocate of quality nursing care and a passionate defender of nurses. Those of us who worked with Clare internationally were inspired by her courage during her illness and send our condolences to the INO on the loss of their president.’

RCN Northern Ireland board secretary Martin Bradley said: ‘Clare was held in very high regard and will be sadly missed.’

Nurses sacrificed their lives in SARS outbreak

By Colin Parish

NURSES PUT their lives on the line caring for people during the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic earlier this year, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) biennial congress in Geneva was told.

In Taiwan four nurses died, including two head nurses and a director of nursing. Last week a nurse in Canada also became a victim of the outbreak. Taiwanese delegate Sheuan Lee said the deaths were tragic but at least her government now understands the true value of nursing.

‘Four of our nurses died because of a lack of protective equipment. But the government started to understand our working conditions and our workload,’ Ms Lee said.

ICN president Christine Hancock said the epidemic increased nurses’ influence and underlined their importance to the health systems of affected countries.

‘It is important to recognise how much it has increased the influence and power of nurses in those countries. It made government officials think about general nursing issues and in the longer run it has given nurses new opportunities,’ Ms Hancock said.

‘Nurses were the front-line soldiers fighting for the country’

Singapore delegate Tan Wee Kong said nurses came into their own during the epidemic. She said the Singapore government announced last week that all the country’s nurses would receive a $1,000 (£342) bonus to reward them for looking after their own during the epidemic.

‘Nurses were the front-line soldiers fighting for the country,’ Ms Wee Kong said.

Hong Kong delegate Alice Tsang said the 100-day crisis in her country raised the profile of nurses. ‘Nurses were highly regarded by the people. We learned a lot and were grateful for the advice of the World Health Organization (WHO),’ Ms Tsang said.

Michael Dector, chair of the Canadian Board for Health Information, said nurses played a key role in the SARS outbreak. The spread among hospital staff was exacerbated by the ‘casualisation’ of the Canadian nursing workforce, Mr Dector said.

Since 1990s a high proportion of nurses work part-time in more than one hospital. ‘Working in three different hospitals became an important risk factor in the transmission of the infection. Our health minister was startled to discover how part-time they were,’ Mr Dector said.

The SARS epidemic is thought to be over now, having claimed more than 800 lives since March 12 when WHO first notified the world of the disease.

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