

# Investment in nursing reaps rewards

**Sam Foster**, Executive Director of Professional Practice, Nursing and Midwifery Council, considers the potential of nurses to improve their local health systems and, through those, the societies in which they live



**O**n 12 May nurses across the country celebrated International Nurses Day (IND) – and although the theme of many events rightly focused on being proud to be a nurse, in advance of IND, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) report (2024) focused on the theme ‘Our Nurses. Our Future. The economic power of care’. This report encourages senior nursing leaders to review the evidence base and reveal the full value of nurses beyond their expert compassionate care.

The report shares key insights into the evidence base of how the focus on the right investment in the nursing profession will be the catalyst for global improvements in the delivery of health care, economic improvements, and the wellbeing of society. I would urge all of us to read this report, which is full of fascinating global case studies and research evidence that can be used in decision making for local planning in the UK. The report contains several key insights.

The report notes the impact of poor health on the global economy, which is currently estimated to cost 15% of gross domestic product (GDP) – that is the value of all goods and services produced by an economy within a country's border each year.

Creating jobs in nursing supports the alleviation of poverty and addresses gender equality in the global workforce. In addition, realising the potential of nurses working in primary care could result in the saving of up to 60 million lives and increase

global life expectancy by 3.7 years.

The report recognises that increasing the number of nurses globally has the potential to increase universal health coverage globally (access to the full range of quality health services people need where and when they need them).

The report calculates that the costs of strengthening health systems can be offset by productivity gains where the economic return could be as much as between \$2 and \$4 for each \$1 invested in better health.

Investing in roles such as advanced nurse practitioners and enabling nurses to have the autonomy to work to their full scope of practice will, it is argued, create the most effectively run health systems at the lowest cost, while still delivering the highest quality of care.

Protecting the health and safety of nurses, whether this be in terms of against infection (the rate of COVID-19 among healthcare workers was up to 9 times higher than in the general population) or via the reduction of violence and aggression against nurses, is required to protect and retain nurses in the workforce.

The report argues that the influence of nursing on the delivery of quality improvements in patient safety not only benefits outcomes for patients, but also offers significant financial savings.

Above all, there is evidence that the tensions that cause conflict diminish when people are healthy and well, inequalities reduce, people are engaged in their societies, and feel valued and respected. And the report argues that nursing contributes to this.

With this evidence base, the ICN call to action to global leaders and policy makers understandably focuses on:

- Empowerment of nurses – supporting policies that help them to practise to the full extent of their training and education, in addition to further development of leadership roles
- Investment in education and the creation of more opportunities for career advancement
- Improvement in working conditions such as increased staffing levels and better working environments
- Fair compensation – ensuring that pay reflects the skills and responsibilities of roles
- Promotion of the contributions of nurses to society.

ICN has emphasised that ignoring the global position of nursing vacancies is preventing the improvement of population health and wealth for all, and that what is required is for governments to fully understand that investment in nursing will reap the rewards that will follow.

To conclude I will quote the words of Dr Pamela Cipriano, the president of ICN:

**‘I would urge all nurses to use this report to increase their influence on policy makers, employers and politicians so that everyone can benefit from the power of nurses and the economic returns that will ensue.’**

This is a call to action for all of us. We all have the opportunity to use the evidence in this report to influence locally, which in turn will influence nationally and, potentially, internationally. **BJN**

International Council of Nurses. International Nurses Day 2024. Our nurses. Our future. The economic power of care. 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8vmtvk> (accessed 14 May 2024)

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