

West African College of Nursing recommends protection of healthcare workforce in the COVID-19 pandemic and development of nursing workforce in West Africa

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Healthcare is a team effort with each healthcare provider being a member of the team with a unique role. Nurses especially play critical and vital roles in healthcare, disease prevention and general health promotion of individuals, families and communities.

The COVID-19 crept into Africa early in 2020 when the continent was not well prepared for it as the overall readiness as per WHO report was only 66%. The disease has taken its toll on nurses and other frontline health workers who become targets of the ravaging pandemic because of already weak health systems in Africa with overburdened staff. The WHO announced in July that over 10,000 health care workers (HCW) in 40 African countries have been infected with COVID-19 with 5% of such infections in 14 sub Saharan Africa.

In view of these, the West African College of Nursing hereby recommends the following:

- Training for all HCWs in the COVID response, partnering with relevant agencies and organizations
- Approval to increase the admission quota of nurses in training institutions to increase the number of nurses
- Standards should be in place for locally manufacturing of PPE and other logistics to ensure appropriate and adequate PPE are available in the region and support on PPE provision by partner Agencies/Organizations
- Government support to put mechanisms in place for increasing the number of certified nurses and other health care staff Government should provide research fund and partner with agencies/organizations
- Support for HCWs – transportation to and from work during lockdown, Insurance coverage, free water and electricity, allowances as incentives and so on.

Recommendations for transforming the development of Nursing Workforce in Africa

A huge challenge to healthcare provision is the shortage of professional nurses in African countries and the lack of political will to address pressing issues regarding the nursing workforce. The WACN is therefore making the following recommendations:

Identified problems

- Unsatisfactory quality and appropriateness of training
- Inadequate/lacking infrastructure
- Inadequate budgetary allocation to nursing education and research
- Inadequate/lacking equipment e.g. PPE
- Variable care across healthcare institutions
- Poor remuneration and welfare of nurses

Effective leadership and political empowerment for active decision making on nursing matters at all government administrative levels

Opportunities of political appointment for nurses

Adequate allocations to nursing in health budgets

Long-term and substantial scale-up of current training institutions' capacity

Strengthening the capacities of the practicing nurses through training and scholarships

Provision of research grants to training institutions for nurses

Leveraging the existing and ready infrastructure, technology and experience that come from partner agencies and organizations

Improvement in remunerations and welfare packages for nurses