

# Over 90,000 health care workers worldwide have been infected with COVID-19

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Last week, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) reported that more than 90,000 nurses, doctors, and other health care workers have tested positive for COVID-19 worldwide, with over 260 health care workers succumbing to the disease.

The Geneva, Switzerland-based organization represents some 20 million nurses of 130 national organizations. ICN's CEO Howard Catton insists that both figures are a serious underestimation of the true scale of infections and deaths among health care workers, given the refusal of governments around the world to keep records of the pandemic's spread to these front-line workers. The numbers reported to the ICN are from only 30 countries' governments, nursing associations, and the media, representing merely 15 percent of all countries in the world.

One month ago, ICN estimated that 23,000 nurses were infected. Catton stated, "If the average health worker infection rate, about 6 percent we think, is applied to that, the figure globally could be more than 200,000 health worker infections today. The scandal is that governments are not systematically collecting and reporting on this information. It looks to us as though they are turning a blind eye which we think is completely unacceptable and will cost more lives. If governments do not count the number of nurses who have lost their lives, if they continue to turn a blind eye, it sends a message that those nurses' lives didn't count."

Catton added, "This failure to record both infection rates and deaths among health care workers is putting more nurses and their patients in danger."

The World Health Organization (WHO), struggling with many of its uncooperative 194 member governments, reports that countries are not supplying the necessary comprehensive data to track the spread of

the disease among their health care personnel and their populations more broadly.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published a paper April 14 in its *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR) regarding health care workers' infections across the US. In states and populations that included data for occupations of those infected, HCPs accounted for fully 11 percent of the total. Women accounted for 73 percent of HCPs with coronavirus, and 38 percent of infected health care workers had at least one underlying chronic illness.

Ninety percent from the CDC study were not hospitalized, but 2 to 5 percent were admitted to an intensive care unit, with 0.3 to 0.6 percent dying. Thirty seven percent of the HCPs who died were age 65 and older.

The study's authors noted, "It is critical to ensure the health and safety of HCPs, both at work and in the community. Improving surveillance through routine reporting of occupation and industry not only benefits HCPs, but all workers during the COVID-19 pandemic."

52-year-old Angeline Bernadel of Stratford, Connecticut worked at a Milford nursing home, telling her husband in mid-March that she was deeply worried about the new coronavirus that was sweeping through the country's chronic care facilities. As reported in the *Hartford Courant* April 15, her husband Jean Bernadel said, "She was panicked. She told me, 'I can die, because this virus is terrible.'"

Bernadel fell ill on March 30, and in two days she obtained a high fever and cough, and was advised to quarantine at home, where her husband cared for her until she died April 4. Angeline was the primary wage earner, since her husband worked as a driver and had become unemployed. "I have a mortgage I have to pay,

but I don't have any work," he reported.

On May 1, the LA Times reported on the death of Brittany Bruner-Ringo, a 32-year-old nurse at Silverado Beverly Place, an upscale memory care facility in the Los Angeles Westside community. After the facility had locked down as part of the statewide shelter-in-place mandate, the dementia care unit notified Bruner-Ringo that she would be admitting a 69-year-old retired surgeon from New York City, en route on a cross country flight to LAX with his daughter.

Bruner-Ringo alleged that the older man was ill when she accompanied him to his room from the parking garage at the care unit, and became ill enough the following day that she had to summon an ambulance for his transport to a hospital, where he was diagnosed with COVID-19. He fully recovered and was later re-admitted to the care facility. In subsequent days, 63 other residents and staff at the facility have tested positive for the virus and 9 have died.

When the new resident tested positive, Bruner-Ringo moved out of her shared apartment to a hotel for self-isolation. She tested positive for COVID-19 and in a week became symptomatic herself, and in early April she was taken by ambulance to Harbor UCLA hospital, admitted to an ICU and intubated for ventilation.

While Bruner-Ringo was in her second week on the ventilator, the consortium ownership of the upscale care home appealed to California Governor Gavin Newsom for liability protection, requesting he sign an executive order indemnifying the company.

Her mother, Kim Bruner-Ringo, also a nurse, drove from Oklahoma City to be near her daughter, though she never saw her until after she died April 20.

Aljazeera News reported May 7 on the severe lack of testing in Afghanistan, and that out of 925 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Kabul, 346 were health care workers. At least 13 physicians have died in the country since early April. Practitioners are fearful enough to have closed their offices, further straining the systems remaining.

A Kabul cardiologist told *Al Jazeera News*, "I have decided to suspend my practice for two months, many doctors will not open their clinics and private nursing homes. Pregnant women are being told to find midwives instead of coming to hospitals."

The war-torn country of 37 million, which has been continuously oppressed by American imperialism since

2001, has a total of 172 hospitals and approximately 4 doctors for every 10,000 people, according to a 2019 report. Physicians have reported to *Reuters* that the country's hospitals are on the verge of collapse, and that many doctors have elected to stay home during the pandemic due to the catastrophic conditions.



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