

Position Statement

THE FOURTH WAVE, HEALTHCARE AT BREAKING POINT

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Specialist nurses respond to unvaccinated European citizens: ‘health systems diagnosed with COVID-19’.

Due to another surge of COVID-19 patients that are admitted to hospital with severe health problems and a large percentage of patients ending up in Intensive Care Units, specialist nurses are concerned. Especially those working in ICU's. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the impact of previous waves were substantial for both nurses, patients and their families.

Let it be abundantly clear that every patient that enters the health care system will be treated, despite the fact that in some cases it seems obvious that the illness could have been prevented by modifying their lifestyle and behavioural choices. For every individual entered into the health care system and under temporary or continued professional care, nurses will act in accordance with their vow to help all patients without discrimination as stated in the first sentence of Article 1 of the Constitution: ‘all men are equal and shall therefore be treated equally’. Any other debate is relevant but should be addressed in places where debates can take place, not on the front line. Nurses working in all sorts of fields such as cardiology, surgery, oncology and other branches, will assist in high priority areas and will therefore be reassigned from their speciality -and in many cases involuntary-¹, even without specific competences required for that speciality. It is up to the health professionals and nurses to help them unconditionally, to the best of their knowledge and available resources. Their willingness, motivation and perseverance has been high.

However, we also recognise that many nurses now acting in these fields -most of them for 2 years now- have reached a critical point. Their willingness and ability to work under extremely difficult circumstances, in some cases even risking their own well-being on a daily basis, can only stretch so far. The impact on their personal life is immense. Many have reached a point where they no longer feel able to work under these conditions. This leads to a further increase of burnouts among nurses and other forms of absenteeism which inevitably leads to a greater shortage in staff² Nurses are aware of this and fill them with moral injuries: moral pain as a result of leaving the job with the knowledge you leave colleagues with higher caseload, wards maybe closed and absence of care for patients in critical need. It also has an impact on carefully- and well established health systems and the continuity of care for those most in need, suffering from causes unrelated to COVID-19.

ESNO European stakeholders, calls to keep today's fragile health systems functioning and to allow the nurses to continue to work across the full spectrum and under reasonable and acceptable working conditions by:

- 1) Recognizing their skills, restore attractivity and avoid disaster in health care systems due to the shortage of SN nurses.
- 2) Prioritizing the continuous mobilization of specialist nurses taking care of patients in a situation that demands a consistent and intense work focus.
- 3) Decreasing nurses physical and psychological fatigue.

¹ <https://bmcnurs.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12912-021-00546-x>

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/nursing-and-midwifery>

The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) is a non-profit organisation and the goal is to facilitate and provide an effective framework for communication and co-operation between the European Specialist Nurses Organisations and its constituent members. ESNO represents the mutual interests and benefits of these organisations to the wider European community in the interest of the public health. Members of ESNO consist of individual European specialist nurses organizations.

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