



World Health  
Organization

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Brésil

17 June 2011

Dear Professor Costa Mendes,

Thank you for your letter expressing your concern regarding the status of recruiting and appointing nurses at the World Health Organization (WHO).

I have always been an advocate of the importance of nursing services and believe strongly in the critical role that nurses and midwives play in supporting individuals, families and communities to fulfil their right to the highest attainable level of health. Health systems cannot deliver quality health services in the absence of sufficient numbers of appropriately trained, motivated, and remunerated health care staff.

I am pleased to report that WHO had very successful discussions on the issues of nursing and midwifery during the Sixty-fourth World Health Assembly that just concluded. Member States debated the Secretariat Report and adopted a resolution on strengthening nursing and midwifery.

WHO is facing serious financial constraints, which currently limit our ability to fill vacant posts within the Organization, including senior nursing positions in Headquarters and Regional Offices. Nevertheless, we will continue to give focus and technical support for the implementation of the Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery 2011-2015, including the filling of the vacant position.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Margaret Chan  
Director-General

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**Dr. Margaret Chan**  
**Director-General of WHO**  
**Avenue Appia 20**  
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Dear Dr. Chan,

Greetings from the 42 WHO Collaborating Centres for Nursing and Midwifery Development. It is with great concern that the members of the Global Network of WHO Collaborating Centres for Nursing and Midwifery Development have accompanied the delay to replace the Coordinator, Health Professions, Nursing and Midwifery, former Chief Nursing Scientist position at WHO.

As Secretary-General of this Network, I am writing to ask your support to solve the lack of nursing's political and scientific representativeness in World Health Organization (WHO) structures. This problem and concern was also recently addressed in an emergency resolution of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) in May 2011. The resolution urges the WHO Director General to empower and finance nursing leadership positions throughout WHO and recruit suitably qualified expert nurses to the vacant positions at WHO Headquarters, regional and national offices.

There is no way nurses can contribute to WHO's mission of Health for All without significant nursing leadership positions in the organization structure that facilitate nurses' potential to contribute to the entire range of WHO responsibilities.

At the same time as nurses intensively take part in the health team at the clinical level and in health research at renowned research centers and universities around the world, without room at the decision making table, the range, visibility and potential of the actions and evidence they produce day after day is clipped.

Our wish and request is that this issue be considered during the upcoming World Health Assembly as, since the departure of Dr. Jean Yan early 2010, the Chief Nursing Scientist position has been changed into Coordinator, Health Professions, Nursing and Midwifery, with two interim officers, unable to provide leadership and guidance due to the limited nature of their function. Therefore, we believe the Chief Nursing Scientist post should be reconsidered and the global importance of this nursing leadership position recognized, as well as the significance of having nurse officers in other WHO structures, including headquarters, regional and national offices.

Although the current number of nurses working in WHO globally is not known, in 2008 there were 8 individuals working on nursing and midwifery at WHO Headquarters, while on the 2007 list there were 14. Therefore, it is seen that the number has declined almost by half in the period. Moreover, at the regional offices there are only 5 Regional advisors for nursing and midwifery instead of 6.

We support the concerns of the ICN and other international nursing organizations and believe and hope this issue will be soon solved.

Sincerely,

**Isabel Amélia Costa Mendes**  
**Secretary-General**  
**Global Network of WHO Collaborating Centres for Nursing and Midwifery Development**

