EDITORIAL

To Our Dear Readers,

I invite you to think about the future, the power of psychiatric nursing, and the need for empowerment within the framework of the 2026 International Nurses Day (IND) theme, "Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives."

As you know, since 1974, IND has been celebrated around the world on May 12, in commemoration of Nightingale's birthday. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) commemorates this day through the production and distribution of IND reports. Each year, ICN selects a theme for IND, and nurses around the world acknowledge and embrace the power they possess and the impact they make. On IND, ICN highlights the vital role of the nursing workforce in improving health outcomes and calls on communities and policymakers worldwide to invest in nursing.

IND themes are relevant to all fields of nursing and provide an opportunity for all specialized nursing fields to review their own situations in line with these themes. There are approximately 30 million nurses worldwide, and nurses constitute the largest occupational group in the health workforce.[1] This situation is also reflected in mental health, where nurses constitute 44% of those working in this field.[2] Therefore, the ability or inability of the psychiatric mental health nursing workforce, as a specific nursing specialty, to contribute effectively and efficiently to health has very important consequences for public mental health. Consequently, focusing on and evaluating the development of psychiatric mental health nursing within the framework of IND themes is essential for public mental health.

The IND 2026 theme is "Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives." In fact, the "Our Nurses. Our Future." theme has been running since 2023. Based on data and IND reports regarding increased awareness of nursing's presence within healthcare teams during the COVID-19 pandemic, ICN has been using this theme since 2023 to continue its call for investment in nursing. ICN President Dr. Pamela Cipriano explained the 2023 theme, which aims to empower nursing and nursing services, as follows.[3]

"Our Nurses. Our Future. sets out what ICN wants for nursing in the future in order to address the global health challenges and improve global health for all. We need to learn from the lessons of the pandemic and translate these into actions for the future that ensure nurses are protected, respected and valued." …….. "The Our Nurses. Our Future. campaign will shine the light on nurses and on a brighter future, moving nurses from invisible to invaluable in the eyes of policy makers, the public, and all those who make decisions affecting the delivery and financing of health care." In this statement, the responsibility of nurses in designing the future is emphasized with the sentence, "….Together our future depends on every nurse, every voice, to not only be on the front lines of care, but also be on the front lines of change."

The IND 2024 theme is "The Economic Power of Care" under the main theme "Our Nurses. Our Future." In line with this theme, the economic dimension of care was emphasized in 2024 through the IND report results, and the demand for investment in the nursing workforce was highlighted with the following statement.[4]

"Our report demonstrates the impact that investing in the nursing workforce has, not only on the well-being of populations, but also on boosting economic growth by enhancing workforce productivity; strengthening health care systems, which is critical for ensuring preparedness and effective response during public health emergencies; alleviating poverty and improving gender equality; and contributing to social cohesion, peace and prosperity." Within this theme, ICN also emphasized the responsibility of nurses as follows: "We 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."

The IND theme for 2025, as defined by ICN again under "Our Nurses. Our Future.," is "Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies."[5] This theme highlighted the critical role that a healthy nursing workforce plays in strengthening economies, improving health systems, and delivering better outcomes for communities worldwide. The IND report identifies solutions for the well-being of nurses to build a healthy future.[5] ICN's "Caring for Nurses Agenda for Sustainable Workforce Well-being" is identified as a set of actions that moves nurses from being invisible to invaluable:

1. Ensure adequate staffing and skill mix for effective care
2. Invest in the right resources and equipment
3. Provide safe and decent working conditions
4. Support education, professional development, and optimal scope of practice
5. Build supportive, high-performing organizational cultures
6. Improve access to health care and well-being supports
7. Value nurses with fair, competitive compensation

The responsibilities of nurses were reiterated in the 2025 theme, and Dr. Pamela Cipriano, ICN President, reminded nurses of the need to actively participate in this process as follows: "We must take action to diminish the threats to safe, supportive and healthy working conditions that will attract future nurses and retain the dedicated nurses who are key to healthier communities, responsive societies, thriving economies and powerful nations."[5]

In 2026, ICN continued to present evidence and steps to support investment in nurses and nursing for a sustainable workforce and stronger health systems. The IND theme for 2026 is "Our Nurses. Our Future. Empowered Nurses Save Lives."[6] According to this theme, "nurses both save and improve lives, and their impact is greatest when they are properly empowered." ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano explained why the nursing workforce needs to be empowered with this striking statement: "Empowering the world's nurses is the surest way to meet today's health challenges and bring care to all people."[7]

The ICN President also made the following statements regarding the ICN theme and the content of structural empowerment: [7]

"……'My watchword as ICN President is empowerment, and this year's theme reflects that commitment to ensuring nurses have the authority, resources, and working conditions they need to deliver exceptional care. True empowerment means eliminating the barriers that prevent nurses from using their full knowledge and skills and creating pathways for nurses' voices to shape the future of care." …..".……."True empowerment is structural. It means leaders making the deliberate choice to invest in the safe, fair working conditions and policies that allow nursing to deliver at its highest impact, consistently and at scale."

The IND 2026 theme also clarifies what is meant by empowering nurses, drawing particular attention to the concept of "structural empowerment," and urgently calls on countries, institutions, and societies to take action as follows.[7]

"Empowerment, in the ICN's framing, is not a motivational abstraction; it demands concrete reforms: safe and adequate staffing ratios, fair and equitable remuneration, protection from workplace violence and moral injury, recognition of nursing's independent scope of practice, and meaningful representation at the highest tables of health governance." ……."ICN is calling on governments to translate commitments into action through funded national workforce plans, improved working conditions, investment in education, expanded scope of practice, and stronger nursing leadership."

The ICN's 2026 theme presents an opportunity to consider the future of psychiatric mental health nursing and demand structural empowerment. However, empowerment and strengthening are not passive waiting processes. Let us establish a starting point and begin to consider the answers to a few questions below, as well as any additional questions you may formulate:

As psychiatric mental health nurses:

- Do we have a perspective on the concepts of power and empowerment?
- Are we aware of the relationship between power and decision-making mechanisms and the consequences of being powerful?
- Do we perceive ourselves as powerful?
- Do we feel equal to and equally powerful as other members of the profession?
- Are we equal to others in accessing and utilizing power resources within the system?
- Do we feel the need for empowerment, and are we conscious of this need? What feelings and thoughts do we have, and what kind of behavior do we exhibit?
- Have we demanded power and empowerment so far?

In the work environment:

- Is the empowerment and strengthening of psychiatric mental health nurses a defined goal for the system, and is an expectation for nursing services based on this outcome defined?
- What mechanism has been established within the institution for the use and sharing of power and power resources?
- Are there defined policies, strategies, values, a culture, and a work environment based on these values regarding the positive use and sharing of power and empowerment?

In conclusion, utilizing the ICN theme and IND resources would be a good starting point for empowering psychiatric mental health nursing and mobilizing both ourselves and society in this process. An empowered psychiatric mental health nurse strengthens community mental health and saves lives. The nursing profession acknowledges the value of human beings and life. Therefore, what needs to be done is clear (is it?). We should not wait any longer to think and take action to participate in empowerment.

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