

COMMENTARY

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# “Nurses and midwives: clean care is in your hands”: the 5th May 2020 World Health Organization *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* campaign

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## Abstract

In honor of Florence Nightingale’s 200th birthday, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2020 the “Year of the Nurse and Midwife”. On May 5th of this year, for the annual celebration of the *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* campaign, WHO will focus on the essential role that nurses and midwives play in contributing to saving millions of lives per year. It is necessary to recognize the work and the immense responsibility that nurses and midwives carry since achieving Universal Health Coverage is highly reliant on them.

**Keywords:** Infection prevention and control, Infection control, Hand hygiene, Nurses, Midwives, World Health Organization, Healthcare-associated infection

## Background

In honor of Florence Nightingale’s 200th birthday, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2020 the “Year of the Nurse and Midwife”. In addition to championing the nursing profession, Nightingale’s role was also fundamental for the recognition of the importance of infection prevention and control (IPC), as she was among the first to recognize that a caregiver could transmit germs, and thus cause patient harm. Nurses and midwives make up nearly 50% of the global health workforce [1], and are the group of healthcare workers that have the most frequent contact with patients. This makes them pivotal figures in the fight against healthcare-associated infections (HAI) as well as neonatal and maternal sepsis.

On the 5th May 2020, for the annual celebration of the *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* campaign, WHO will focus on the essential role that nurses and midwives play in contributing to saving millions of lives each year by championing clean care (Fig. 1). Despite many improvements around the world, rates of HAI remain unacceptably high, and the majority of them are transmitted by healthcare workers’ hands. Therefore, hand hygiene promotion strategies must be constantly reinforced and improved. Clean healthcare has recently been recognized by WHO as one of the most urgent challenges to be tackled by the global community over the next ten year [2]. Actively engaging the expertise of nurses and midwives in the development, implementation and evaluation of hand hygiene promotion contributes to clean healthcare.

Along with recognizing the critical importance of nurses and midwives to patient care, the aim of the “Year of the Nurse and Midwife” is also to highlight that there is a major global shortage of healthcare workers, and that more than half of the shortage is of nurses and

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**Table 1** The 5 May 2020 World Health Organization *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* Campaign Calls to Action

Campaign Participants	Call to Action
Nurses	"Clean and safe care starts with you."
Midwives	"Your hands make all the difference for mothers and babies."
IPC leaders	"Empower nurses and midwives in providing clean care."
Policy makers	"Increase nurse staffing levels to prevent infections and improve quality of care. Create the means to empower nurses and midwives."
Patients and families	"Safer care for you, with you."

Abbreviations: *IPC* infection prevention and control; *WHO* World Health Organization

midwives [1]. WHO estimates that for countries to succeed in reaching the Sustainable Development Goal # 3 on health and well-being, the world will need an additional 9 million nurses and midwives by the year 2030 [1]. It has been proven that investing in education and job creation in the health and social sectors will result

in improved health outcomes, global health security, and economic growth [1]. Having adequate healthcare worker staffing reduces the risk of HAI and antimicrobial resistance, and is thus recommended by WHO as a core component of effective IPC programmes [3].

It is crucial to recognize both the work and the immense responsibility that nurses and midwives carry: we cannot achieve Universal Health Coverage without investing in them. Everyone- including policy makers, healthcare workers, and patients themselves- can contribute to improving hand hygiene and preventing infections (Table 1).

Please join us in celebrating this vital and often under-appreciated group of HCW; "Nurses and Midwives: CLEAN CARE is in YOUR HANDS"!

**Conclusion**

Nurses and midwives make are the group of healthcare workers that have the most frequent contact with patients, making them pivotal figures in the fight against healthcare- associated infections as well as neonatal and maternal sepsis. Despite many improvements around the world, rates of healthcare- associated infections remain



**Fig. 1** May 5, 2020: "Nurses and Midwives, clean care is in your hands!". The May 5, 2020, World Health Organization *SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands* campaign slogan and main promotional image (2020 hashtags: #SupportNursesAndMidwives #HandHygiene #InfectionPrevention). Campaign participants are invited to submit photos or selfies of them holding a board with the slogan and hashtags at [www.CleanHandsSaveLives.org](http://www.CleanHandsSaveLives.org)

unacceptably high, and the majority of them are transmitted by healthcare workers' hands. Please join us in celebrating this vital and often underappreciated group of healthcare workers. "Nurses and midwives: CLEAN CARE is in YOUR HANDS"!

#### Acknowledgements

Didier Pittet works with WHO in the context of the WHO initiative 'Private Organizations for Patient Safety – Hand Hygiene'. The aim of this WHO initiative is to harness industry strengths to align and improve implementation of WHO recommendations for hand hygiene in health care indifferent parts of the world, including in least developed countries. In this instance, companies/industry with a focus on hand hygiene and infection control related advancement have the specific aim of improving access to affordable hand hygiene products as well as through education and research. All listed authors declare no financial support, grants, financial interests or consultancy that could lead to conflicts of interest. The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this article and they do not necessarily represent the views, decisions or policies of the institutions with which they are affiliated. WHO takes no responsibility for the information provided or the views expressed in this paper.

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#### Authors' contributions

All authors helped with drafting the manuscript. DP critically revised and supervised the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

#### Funding

This work is supported by WHO, Geneva, Switzerland, and the Infection Control Program, University of Geneva Hospitals and Faculty of Medicine, Geneva, Switzerland; hand hygiene research activities at the SPCI/WCC are also supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant number 32003B\_163262). Potential conflicts of interest.

#### Availability of data and materials

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

#### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests. All authors have submitted the ICMJE Form for Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest. Conflicts that the editors consider relevant to the content of the manuscript have been disclosed.

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Received: 26 March 2020 Accepted: 2 April 2020

Published online: 19 April 2020

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Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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