

Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation

25th Biennial Meeting - 23 - 24 September 2022

President's Report

As nurses and midwives across the Commonwealth gather virtually for the 25th Biennial Meeting - how can I put into words the extent of the challenges that we have all faced, personally and professionally?

Our 24th Biennial meeting in 2020 concluded just days before the COVID 19 pandemic began restricting our movement and increasing the demands on health care professionals worldwide.

Across the Commonwealth, nurses and midwives have been at the forefront during the pandemic as teams rose to the challenge of this unprecedented situation. Commonwealth countries and regions mobilised health care staff and resources to an extent never before seen.

We faced the rapid growth in those affected and the significant number of patients suffering severely from this virus across the Commonwealth. The human cost has been felt across our professions and CNMF send our sincere sympathy to family and friends who have been affected by loss and our best wishes to colleagues experiencing long term issues.

Our Commonwealth members have gone the extra mile throughout; working long hours, introducing new innovative practice, planning crisis management and addressing workforce shortages. Many Nursing and Midwifery Associations have deployed extra training to ensure staff are able to continue to deliver care and maintain safety.

On behalf of the CNMF I have worked with other Commonwealth healthcare professional groups in utilising and sharing the Commonwealth COVID 19 Dashboard to offer crucial data and analysis to governments and health workers during the pandemic. The pandemic has led to the valuable contribution of healthcare professionals being recognised more than ever before.

As we continue to confront inequalities across the Commonwealth, we are also seeing newly emerging problems and increasingly excessive demands on the availability of health services. Our National Nurses Associations have undertaken significant activity in supporting members in all regions throughout this time. My deepest thanks to the NNA leaders across our membership who have diligently and unwaveringly supported our colleagues through a variety of endeavours.

The 25th Biennial Meeting brings a number of our valued colleagues' terms of office to an end and on behalf of CNMF I offer my sincere thanks to our outgoing Board Members:

Annie Butler – Pacific Region

Paul Magesa - ECSA Region

Bettyann Murray John – Atlantic Region

Our replacement Board Members are presently being sought - I would urge those contemplating applications to consider how important these roles are in leading the voice of your region within the Commonwealth family.

Over these last few years, I am sure, like me, your digital skills have been developed and honed as technology has enabled us to work together remotely. Whether using Zoom, Teams, Skype or podcasts, I have spoken with colleagues throughout this time, often directly with those in key leadership positions or by addressing national conferences.

An essential element of CNMF's activity over this period has been the unstinting contribution of our Executive Secretary, Jill Iliffe. Jill's tireless work has kept CNMF at the forefront of Commonwealth health activity. Jill and I have attended numerous virtual meetings ensuring that CNMF continues to function as a Commonwealth accredited organisation which can actively access, participate and contribute to Commonwealth Ministers' meetings, heads of government sessions and the Commonwealth Foundation. Sincere thanks are also due to the generous support we receive from Baroness Scotland, Commonwealth Secretary-General.

My particular thanks go to the Trained Nurses' Association of India who have faced many issues over this period. Their Board representative and leadership team have been exemplary, working tirelessly on behalf of the profession. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible support provided to both Jill and I by my Deputy President, Rosemarie Josey who is always there to lend a hand whenever it is needed.

At our 24th Biennial Meeting Jill announced her intention to retire, but as the pandemic surged it became clear that it was not the right time to change the CNMF leadership and Jill agreed to stay and support us through this period. Our sincere thanks to Jill for remaining in post. As the world recovers from the pandemic, the Board will now progress this issue.

It is with great sadness that we learned of the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth on 8 September 2022. The Commonwealth family have expressed our deep sympathy and sincere condolences have been sent to King Charles III and the Royal Family on behalf of CNMF.

During her reign the late Queen met many Commonwealth nurses and midwives. It was our great honour when, as a special act on International Nurses Day in 2020, HRH personally telephoned me to express her gratitude and thanks to CNMF members during these challenging days. The Queen has a special place in our memory and I believe King Charles III will continue this relationship.

My Presidency has perhaps not followed the previous models of presidency but I have explored and undertaken many activities through various media on behalf of the CNMF and in collaboration with other Commonwealth organisations. I want to thank my Board members, Rosemarie Josey, CNMF Deputy President, and Jill for their advice, support and contribution throughout.

As we move forward, we must work to influence the many agendas that affect nursing and midwifery within the Commonwealth and on the global stage. We can all mobilise our energies in influencing key health policies; workforce, recruitment and retention and improving our working conditions. Our society and our planet need nurses and midwives to be involved in addressing climate change, economic uncertainty and equality issues. We are front and centre in ensuring your voices are heard. Please support our work in doing so across the Commonwealth.

To each and every one of you - our members - a huge thank you for everything you have done. Please stay positive and enthusiastic for the benefit of our patients, colleagues and communities worldwide.

Thank you.

Professor Kathleen McCourt CBE FRCN

President CNMF

24 September 2022