International Nurses Day is observed on May 12 every year to celebrate the contribution of nurses to health systems strengthening and health outcomes. The theme for 2012 is "Closing the Gap: From Evidence to Action". Activities on this day are coordinated by the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and National Nurses’ Associations around the globe.

In the quest for quality of care and cost effectiveness, nursing services should use an evidence-based approach. Nurses are required to deliver quality nursing services or take action to meet the clients’ needs based on evidence. More important, evidence is required to support decision making, action to tackle issues and challenges and for policy formulation in nursing.

The use of evidence-based practice in nursing is not yet common in countries of South-East Asia. In addition, updated and reliable evidence in nursing is still very scarce and not easily available. This area needs to be urgently strengthened. WHO has been advocating and supporting evidence-base practice and evidence-based decision/policy in Member States and will continue to do so to close the gap in creating evidence and using evidence in action.

Nursing is an art and science discipline. It is important for nurses to use an evidence-based approach to support clinical judgement and for scientific practice. Use of evidence helps nurses to carry out pre decision-making process in a systematic and visible way which can be clearly communicated to others. It allows nurses to constantly review their practice and seek new and more effective ways of doing things, provides options/choices of actions, increases likelihood of new practice or change of practice and promote positive outcomes.

Evidence in nursing is derived from various sources including clinical audit data, experiences of patients or clients, clinical experience, opinions of colleagues, expert opinion, review of research and clinical guidelines and research. Systematic review, critical review, clinical guidelines and care pathways can be used by nurses as
secondary evidence. The search engine on the internet has made it possible to search across multiple resources simultaneously.

It is important for nurses to ensure that evidence is good enough to use, applicable in the proposed client setting and is clinically meaningful or clinically significant.

Change of practice may be difficult if it involves changing the way people and system behave. This requires an environment that encourages and values ideas, innovations and evidence. Evidence-based practice can be fostered and implemented through partnerships with individuals, groups or teams, using champions/change agents, sharing and disseminating information, education and training and standardized practice. Networking is also important in sharing and dissemination of evidence-based practice.

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) which is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations, representing more than 13 million nurses worldwide developed the kit on “Closing the gap: from evidence to action”. The kit provides information on evidence-based practice, sources of evidence and the move from evidence to action to change of practice. At the 65th World Health Assembly meeting between May 21-26, 2012, ICN will make interventions on WHO reform; prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs); global burden of mental disorders; substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled/counterfeit medical products; and WHO’s human resources annual report. Prior to that, the fourth Triad meeting of the ICN, the International Confederation of Midwives and WHO will be held on 18-19 May 2012 to focus on the contribution of nurses and midwives in the prevention and control of NCDs and curriculum and scopes of practice to effectively address NCDs. All of these interventions require strong evidence to get practical recommendations and high level political commitment.

Every nurse could produce evidence and is encouraged to deliver evidence-based practice. This will help in improving health outcomes as well as advancing the nursing profession.

On the occasion of International Nurses Day, WHO joins its partners in commending nurses for their contribution to the Millennium Development Goals, promotion of health equity and health for all.