

Legislative Issues

Health Care Policy for Today's Nurse: The Crucial Role You Play

Health policy and politics are some of the emerging roles of nurses as entrepreneurs, decision-makers, and political activists. Historically, political activism has often meant “letting someone else get involved.” As Ralph Nader so eloquently stated, “The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers” (Quotes.net, 2016). It is important that nurses are represented in the formation of health care policy and that nursing values, knowledge, and expertise are shared with politicians so that cost effective, quality health care legislation can be achieved. Nursing's active involvement in the molding of public policy through political commitment is a necessity; it is not enough to wait and see where legislation takes the profession and how changes in public policy will affect patients. If nurses do not become involved and employ a values-laden approach to politics, they have no power over their own future or the profession, and health care will suffer from lack of nurse participation.

As the new session of congress began for 2016, our AMSN nurses participated in the Nurse in Washington Internship (NIWI) in March, held in The Westin Crystal City, Arlington, VA. This workshop is sponsored by the Nursing Organizations Alliance (NOA). This is one example of nurses' engagement in political activism. NIWI is a workshop that provides a wide range of topics, from the basic legislative process to health care policy. The common thread for nurses from all sections of the United States is the important role nurses have in the legislative process. The six AMSN members selected for the honor of attending the 2016 NIWI were emerged in a variety of topics (NOA, 2016).

The NIWI Experience

- Advocacy 101/201 Breakout Sessions: Overview of Public Policy Process
- Advocacy Training
- Panel Session with Professional Nurse Advocates
- Congressional Staff Panel Session
- State Team Break Outs for Hill Preparation (including role-playing)
- Opportunity to Meet with Representative and Senators on Capitol Hill
- Networking with Other Nurses with Similar Clinical and Political Interests

The “Legislative Issues” column (formerly known as “Health Care Reform”) is a place to convey the voice of the nurse on issues surrounding health care policy, bills and laws impacting patients and professionals, and other governmental developments. These articles are for *you*. Your voice matters.

Internship Outcome Objectives

- Describe how nurses can be involved and influence policy at the local and national level.
- Discuss how to work effectively with legislative staff to advance policy agendas.
- Describe key steps to effect change in the legislative process.
- Identify techniques to advance legislative issues at the grassroots level.
- Identify legislative, political, and economic forces driving health care policy and delivery changes today.
- Learn to schedule Capitol Hill meetings.

As a 2015 recipient of the honor to attend the NIWI convention, I can attest to gaining a great deal of knowledge relating to the legislative process, leading to positive political action. Attending the NIWI convention led to a desire to follow current health care legislation, strategies in knowing how and when to contact state representatives and senators with requests for co-sponsoring bills, and the interest to attend town hall meetings to “let MY voice be heard.” All nurses should do the same in order to move the nursing profession forward and continually improve the quality of patient care.

References

- Nursing Organizations Alliance (NOA). (2016). *The Alliance: Nurse in Washington Internship (NIWI)*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.nursing-alliance.org/dnn/Events/NIWI-Nurse-in-Washington-Internship>
- Quotes.net. (2016). *Ralph Nader quotes*. Retrieved February 1, 2016, from <http://www.quotes.net/quote/15932>

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If you have questions or comments regarding the “Legislative Issues” column, or if you are interested in writing, please contact Column Editor Sheila Kennedy-Stewart at srks@cox.net.