

Nurse in Washington Internship Experience



As a 3-year officer of the local chapter of AMSN, nursing political policy has been discussed, but I have never taken the step to be involved. The Nurse in Washington Internship (NIWI) grant from AMSN informed me of the NIWI experience

available to nurses. Wow! What a great experience and a memory maker for my nursing career. I felt privileged to have been a part of a group of talented, well-educated, passionate nurses.

NIWI is an annual program that offers nurses the opportunity to learn the legislative process and identifies political and economic forces driving health care policy. It also discusses how to work with legislative staff to advance policy agendas and schedules capitol meetings with senators and congressmen.

Nurses from across the U.S. (92 total) representing many nursing organizations gathered at the Liaison Hotel conference room to begin our journey into the world of health care policy. NIWI is pre-

sented by The Nursing Organizations Alliance™. The Alliance is a coalition of over 50 nursing organizations united to create a strong voice for nurses. This aligns with the vision of AMSN that med-surg nurses use their powerful voice and focused action to continuously improve patient care.

The NIWI program opened with a panel discussion of the core issues facing the nursing profession today. The panel included Suzanne Miyamotoe, PhD, RN, Director of Government Affairs, American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN); April Canter, MPA, Associate Director, Government Affairs with American Nurses Association (ANA); and Jo Ann Webb, RN, MHA, Director, Federal Relations and Policy, American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE).

Another panel discussion addressed the Institute of Medicine's *Future of Nursing* report as it relates to policy. As the panel information was absorbed, it became more apparent the political impact nursing could and should have at the local and national level if all 2.4 million nurses in the U.S. used our voices.

Advocacy sessions offered training and role-playing. Legislative staff and aides provided information on how to discuss topics and techniques used when visiting Capitol Hill. The Alliance supplied talking points that had been developed through the collaboration of the nursing organizations belonging to the Alliance. Three talking points were financial support for the nursing workforce development programs (Title VIII, Public Health Service Act), financial support for the National Institute of Nursing Research, and support for nurse-managed health clinics.

All the information and training led to the big day, our visit on Capitol Hill. Each NIWI participant had an opportunity to visit his or her state senators and congressmen. I partnered with another attendee from my state to visit Senator Clair McCaskill and Senator Roy Blunt, where we sat with a staff member to discuss the Nursing Community Request to Promote the Health of Americans and Increase Access to Care. Neither of the Missouri Senators sits on the Appropriations Committee, but they said they would consider support for the topics. When I met with Congressman Sam Graves's staffer, he gave me the name of a Missouri congressman who does sit on the Appropriations Committee whom I could contact for support. At the end of the day, a "Shout Out" session allowed participants to share their experiences on Capitol Hill. A highlight for some of the participants was meeting their senators and watching them in action as they voted on senate bills.

I did not realize the impact nursing could have in legislation. Capitol Hill heard the voices of 92 nurses passionate about their profession and asking for needed financial support to continue a healthy nursing workforce. As a seasoned nurse, I would encourage any nurse to take the opportunity to experience nursing policy at the local, state, or national level. We do have a voice, so let us be heard.

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Note: AMSN encourages you to apply for the NIWI scholarship this fall. For more information, visit www.amsn.org and click the *Scholarships & Grants* tab.