

The Prominent Role of the Nurse in Healthcare Legislation and Advocacy

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is one of the national voices for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education, representing more than 790 member schools of nursing at public and private universities nationwide. AACN works to establish quality standards for nursing education; assists schools in implementing those standards; influences the nursing profession to improve health care; and promotes public support for professional nursing education, research, and practice.¹ In government relations and other advocacy efforts, AACN works to advance public policy on nursing education, research, and practice. AACN is a leader in securing sustained federal support for nursing education and research; shaping legislative and regulatory policy affecting nursing schools; and ensuring continuing financial assistance for nursing students.¹

Since 2010, AACN has offered a Student Policy Summit in Washington, DC for nursing students enrolled at its member institutions. Students who attend the Summit are immersed in didactic program sessions focused on the federal policy process and nursing's role in professional advocacy. This is a great opportunity for students to see our elected policymakers at work and hear national healthcare leaders discuss policy development and future trends in healthcare, while networking with their peers. Students also visit Capitol Hill with AACN member deans and directors to discuss priorities that contribute to the national healthcare dialogue.

I represented Thomas Jefferson University, Jefferson College of Nursing at the AACN 2016 Student Policy Summit. The Summit enhanced my understanding of the political process and how nursing advocacy can

bring about change in the larger health care system. The future of nursing profoundly depends on developing nurses that learn the skills to be effective advocates who influence and inspire other leaders to come together in new ways of thinking and practice.

Among the Summit highlights was the keynote address by Deputy Surgeon General Rear Admiral Sylvia Trent-Adams, PhD, RN, FAAN, who examined the critical role of nurses in healthcare transformations. While nurses continue to influence clinical care at the bedside, Dr. Trent-Adams emphasized the importance of developing policies and creating innovative strategies to improve the health of our nation. She also reaffirmed the need to attract and retain nurse leaders to advance the profession by elevating the voice of nursing, and ultimately securing a 'seat in the board room' where strategic healthcare decisions are made. Otherwise, the profession becomes vulnerable to policy made without regard for the needs of nursing and nursing practice.

The three-day Summit included multiple sessions on the skills necessary for effective professional advocacy and how our roles as advocates will raise awareness among legislatures on Capitol Hill and the general public. Nurse leaders and researchers petitioned all the nurses in the room to explore research opportunities and consider how participating in research initiatives can directly impact health policy and care delivery systems.

Guided instructions regarding the Capitol Hill visit prepared us for constructive dialogue when visiting with healthcare legislative assistants from Congressman Robert Brady (PA1) of the 1st District;



Carol Ann Gioia visited Representative Brady's office as part of the policy summit.

Congressman Brendan Boyle (PA13); of the 13th district and Senators Robert Casey Jr. (D) and Patrick Toomey (R).

The purpose of each of the visits was to lobby support for:

1. Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Program, which requests \$244 million in federal funding towards advancing education, training, recruitment, and retention of the nursing workforce², and addressing the faculty nurse shortage. Most recently the legislation passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and is now ready for full Senate consideration.
2. National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) Program, which requests continued funding for \$157 million to support NINR's work on health promotion/wellness, disease prevention, chronic illness symptoms management, and improving the quality of life.³ Improving Veterans Access to Quality Healthcare Act (H.R. 1247 & S. 2279) request full endorsement of Act (H.R. 1247 & S. 2279) full practice privileges for APRNs to ensure safe, access to care for our nation's Veterans. The bill was introduced to the House of Representatives in March of 2015 and has been referred several subcommittees for consideration.

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The AACN views advocacy as being integral to the ability to shape, advance, and promote a professional nursing workforce to meet the health care needs of Americans. Advocacy can be traced back to the “Lady with the Lamp”, Florence Nightingale, whose life’s mission involved advocating for the rights of patients, particularly the poor, and

fighting to reform laws. The opportunity to collaborate with elected officials toward advancing the practice of nursing and affecting policy that better enables us to provide the quality care patients deserve was a deeply enriching experience. It is a privilege to be a nursing professional committed to this rich tradition of advocacy.

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