

Nurse In Washington Internship Scholarship Report  
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I was honored to be selected to receive a full scholarship to attend the Nurse In Washington Internship (NIWI) event in Washington DC this Spring. I had attended a similar event in the Spring of 2014 hosted by the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA.) ENA's "Day on the Hill," like NIWI, also featured a day and a half of education about the legislative and appropriations process followed by a day of lobbying with our Senators and Congressional Representatives.

Going to NIWI, I hoped that I could bring experience and insight from the ENA event to the Alliance's event. I also hoped that the NIWI experience would give me new insights that I could bring to future ENA events. I think that the incoming knowledge that I shared with others at NIWI did benefit other nurses during our days together. NIWI definitely gave me additional experience and confidence toward my future dealings with our legislators. While I know my state and city legislators very well, it was great to return to where things happen on the national level.

While I currently live in Nebraska, I grew up in DC and was active in a number of grassroots organizations until I moved West in 1997. My general logistical knowledge of the DC area—the Metro subway, the layout of Capitol Hill, and the best places to eat—helped me to assist others navigate their days more easily. I think that slight majority of the NIWI attendees were Advanced Practice Nurse or in school to achieve graduate-level education. This was somewhat intimidating to a frontline working nurse like me. One thing that I was able to educate some of my more advanced colleagues on was the use of social media in healthcare. I educated a number of fellow attendees on the basics of Twitter (my favorite ( @CurtisRN ) and posting tweets with the conference hashtag ( #NIWI2015 .)

The Nursing Organizations Alliance put together a stellar lineup of speakers to talk to us about legislation and lobbying. Lauren Inouye from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing was especially knowledgeable and passionate in discussing the power of nurses to speak out and affect change on the national level. There was also a bit of role-play and practice to prepare us for our meetings with legislators.

My partner for talking to Nebraska legislators was Rose Pauley-Hunter, an APRN from Omaha representing the Association of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition Nurses. While our training and practices are different, like any two nurses, we shared a lot of common ground. She was an unfailingly positive and enjoyable partner for our discussions. Her association also has a DC-based lobbyist who we were able to talk to during our day on the Hill.

After a day and a half of really outstanding networking and training, the NIWI attendees were unleashed on our legislators on Capitol Hill. I was lucky at ENA's "Day on the Hill" to have the opportunity to meet, if very briefly, with most of our state legislators. The more substantial discussions were with their aides, but our Nebraska delegation did meet last year with Congressmen Fortenberry and Smith, and with Senator Fischer. This year, all of the legislators were unavailable due to various commitments (except for a very brief handshake and greeting from Senator Fischer.) We did, however have very cordial and well-received discussions with aides with four offices.

Our "asks" involved maintaining—and ideally increasing—funding to the National Institute of Nursing Research and to Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs. By the time we got to our meeting with Deb Fischer's staff in the afternoon, our "pitch" was well-

polished as we discussed the benefits of nursing research and nursing jobs on hospital quality and to the Nebraska economy.

We also discussed support for legislation and rules changes to allow Advanced Practice Nurses to have full scope of practice throughout the Veterans Affairs healthcare system. (Currently they are subject to the scope of practice limitations of the state where they are working.) It was fun and attention-grabbing to say, after two funding requests, “We have something else we need your support on, and IT DOESN’T COST ANYTHING!”

Our visit to the office of newly-elected Senator Ben Sasse was something of an adventure on both sides. After the shakeups of the 2014 election, all legislators were switching—ideally upgrading—their offices. Sasse had drawn the number 99 in the lottery of 100 legislators moving. While waiting his turn to select and move into an office (in early March, after taking office in January) his staff was shoehorned into a somewhat makeshift office in the basement of the Dirkson Senate Office Building. The newly-hired staff who met with us did not yet have business cards. The office receptionist was a lovely and VERY professional 11 year-old girl, who I think is the Senator’s daughter. (She was so friendly and efficient, it seemed rude to ask what she was doing there!) It was a very full and tiring day, ending with a dash to the airport for a late flight home to Lincoln, Nebraska.

All in all, the Nurse In Washington Internship was an educational, empowering, and FUN experience. As I stated above, but goal in attending was bring previous experience to share, and to take away new knowledge to use. I think that I was able to accomplish both in fine style.

I think that I was able to ease and enrich the experience of other NIWI attendees as they made their way through the training and in their legislative experience. I DEFINITELY learned new things from NIWI. I have continued to track the legislation we pushed for and continued to discuss it with legislative staffers. Recently the ENA informed us that grant funding for putting public-access Automated External Defibrillators in rural areas is endangered for the 2016 budget. I am organizing Nebraska ENA to lobby our congressional representatives to keep this funding in the budget.

In conclusion, I would like to give my most heartfelt thanks to the Alliance and its component organizations for the scholarship support to attend the Nurse In Washington Internship program in 2015. It was an amazing event, and I think that the experience will continue to help me—and help me to lead other nurses—to find a legislative voice for years to come.

Thanks so much for your support!

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