

Nursing In Washington Internship

The Nurse in Washington Internship was a truly empowering experience. The complex process of implementing policy changes is not a simple thing to navigate. This conference however, provided the tools to identify and advocate for changes we as nurses can inspire.

At the conference we discussed how nurses are advocating in Washington. Advanced practice groups are working well at a Federal level. Nurse practitioner round table gets together once a week to address issues. There is a lack of knowledge about advanced practice nurses on Capital Hill. This is an opportunity for us to educate about the different roles in nursing in order to advocate for policy change.

On the first day Dave Mason spoke about his vision of an “Inter-professional nonhierarchical design”. He described his concern about about staffing shortages as we open insurance up to millions of people but don’t have people to staff this. As a young future nurse this was a concern. It is something was discussed among my peers upon return home. By 2020 will need an additional 1.2 million nurses because we have an aging baby boomer population We really need to bolster the nursing workforce. This was a concern voiced by speaker Lauren Inouye. It fueled conversations back at my School of Nursing about how to replace the wave of upcoming retirement, when we are too young to teach and don’t have the experience yet to replace retiring faculty. Going into education was something many of us hadn’t thought about before and this information was very provocative for us.

One of the other key points that we taken home is that as we advocate for changes we want to see implemented we have to remember that they take time. We as nurses offer first hand experience that is immensely helpful, but as accurate or important as this information may be it still takes time for policy change to occur, and even longer for it to trickle down to take effect. This may sound discouraging, but this processes is very empowering. We as citizens and as nurses can instigate these changes, and even though it may be a tedious process, it is a process we have a right and an obligation to assist.

At NIWI I also learned how to establish and maintain relationships with members of congress. Frank Purcell talked to us about how to navigate establishing and maintaining these relationships. He shared with us that when you speak with members of congress to bring up issues that they can actually do something about in policy. You need to link it to why it is important to the big picture. Telling a story is not enough, although persuasive, you need to communicate what you want them to do. Make a plan to follow up, that is the only way to get change.

Another speaker at the conference, Jo Anne Web described the optimistic improvements our profession is making toward effective advocacy. She described a growing community of unity in the nursing voice. We also heard about the benefits of a current advocacy topic, establishing nurse managed clinics. She described these as “wonderful entities”. He message was that nurse advocacy is growing. As a profession being unified is essential to progress and this can be achieves by strengthen our professional organizations.

On the last day of the conference we had the honor of visiting Capitol Hill. We were able to advocate first hand as a unified voice for the nursing profession. This was a daunting and invigorating experience. Upon returning to my home state to my school of nursing it was

wonderful to explain this process, and that it is indeed plausible to accomplish. We as nurses can voice our concerns, supported by our professional experience to initiate the change we wish to see. It takes energy, and courage to address these issues with our senators and representatives. But as Frank Purcell so accurately put “ There is nothing that is valuable that is not high maintenance” .

The NIWI conference was an amazing experience. It made the idea that my voice, as a nurse can have an impact on policy making. It explained in an attainable way how to implement this power that we have as nurses, and citizens. It also illuminated the weight that our voices have when we are unified. It is inspiring to know that as a profession we have the capability to take what we see at the bedside and use this experience to improve the system to provide the best patient care.

Very gratefully, Paige M. Pendarvis