



## **2015 Nurse In Washington Internship (NIWI)**

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### **Legislative Special Interest Group Chair**

#### **American Pediatric Surgical Nurses Association (APSNA)**

I would first like to thank the Nursing Organization Alliance (NOA) for the scholarship and the opportunity to attend NIWI this year. The American Pediatric Surgical Nurses Association has been active in NOA for years and has participated in the NIWI experience for the past few years as well. As outgoing Immediate Past President and incoming Legislative Special Interest Group (SIG) Chair there was a goodness of fit for me. It has been clear to me that our organization needs to have a greater focus on advocacy and to learn to develop coalitions that support nursing's legislative agenda. Attendance at NIWI is a common pathway for entry into this role.

The participants represented a broad range of nursing organizations with highly variable experience in the legislative process. It was reassuring to note that I was not the only novice in attendance this year and the content was similarly variable in its approach to the experience level of the audience. Not only was the content stellar, but the opportunities to meet and network with other nurse leaders were extremely useful to someone who will be carving out this new role.

Legislative advocacy can seem complicated and intimidating. NIWI gives us the beginning and essential tools for navigating this process. We were given a large packet of materials to prepare us both prior to and at our arrival. In just the first half day it was clear that the speakers and coordinators had the skills for navigating the legislative process and to successfully interact with legislators on the Hill. During the first session that day we were given the opportunity to interact with professional nurse advocates. These were representatives from very large nursing

and advocacy groups. When listening to their experience working with legislators on issues relevant to nursing and health care it was clear that I had quite a bit to learn. The next hour we were given an overview of the three major talking points that we would have as our primary focus when meeting with our Representatives and Senators on the final day. I was relieved to know so much had been done to prepare us and this gave me the comfort level to add some of my own talking points when meeting with my Representative and Senators. This also set the stage for the sessions to be held the next day.

All the sessions were interactive giving each participant an opportunity to try on this new role. I found the first session of day two to be particularly useful. Representatives of Congressional Staff attended the panel discussion. They provided insight from the perspective of individuals who meet with constituents on a daily basis. I find this to be as useful as those that come from constituents who spend their day meeting with Congressional Staff. It not only gave us an opportunity to see the perspective of both sides of the dialogue but it also provided us with tips on how to present succinctly and purposefully during meetings that are notoriously short. Later there were two break-out sessions focusing on advocacy at both the novice and the expert level. There was something for everyone. I felt compelled to move between both sessions.

That afternoon there was a panel of Professional Advocates. Although the speakers were not nurses, they worked with large Nursing Organizations as advocates housed in the DC area so that their time could be spent solely advocating for the issues relevant to the Nursing Organization they served. Being a small organization without these resources it was sobering to see how much can be accomplished with someone focusing on this full time on Nursing's behalf. This clearly makes a strong case for organizations like APSNA to develop coalitions with larger organization with a common goal, mission, and vision.

I found the last session, if not the most useful, certainly equally useful. It provided participants with an opportunity to role play discussion with their Representatives and Senators using the talking points which we were all expected to bring up the next day on the Hill. One of the Program Coordinators and the Professional Advocates selected attendees giving us an opportunity to try this role on for size.

This session was extremely helpful to me in terms of organizing my own presentation the next day.

On the final day we all made our way to the Hill. I met with Representative Langevin (RI) and his administrative staff, Senator Reed (RI) and Senator Whitehouse (RI). Two of the three were able to make themselves available for a portion of the time. To my surprise they were well versed in the three areas I came prepared to discuss. This made it abundantly clear to me that if you meet with your Representatives and Senators, at the very least, you must know as much about the issue as they do. You must come prepared. NIWI undoubtedly prepares you for this and more. I liken it to a “boot camp” for nurses who want to engage in the legislative process and I can’t thank NOA enough for making this possible. I hope to attend again and will be encouraging my APSNA colleagues and others to attend as well.