

## 2014 Nurse in Washington Internship (NIWI)

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At the recommendation of my organization's leadership, American Assembly for Men in Nursing, I submitted a request for a scholarship to attend the 2014 session of the Nursing Organizational Alliance. What an honor to be selected to participate! Naturally, along with the honor and excitement, I had some trepidation as my national legislative experience was limited. However, that was soon alleviated with the program's organizational structure, content and presenters.

Each participant received a binder upon registration that provided all the necessary documents along with the presentations. The diversity of the speakers as well as their legislative expertise was clearly demonstrated. Panel members discussed topics on protecting/advancing nursing practice in the climate of health care policy change, professional advocacy, and congressional staff experiences. Additional presentations included detailed instructions on how to interact with the various individuals in the House of Congress and Senate, nursing leadership and influencing in health policy. The speakers freely interacted with the attendees and encouraged debate and questions. Upon conclusion of the educational session, I felt well prepared to interact with my legislative representatives and/or staff to verbalize our requests and accomplish our mission.

Learning did not stop with the conclusions of the speakers. Multiple opportunities existed for attendees to network, collaborate, and interact with nurses from across the United States.

Business card exchanges were frequent. I know that I have developed several strong connections with many of the participants that I believe will last my professional career.

This year marked the largest attendance for the event. South Carolina had the largest number of representatives. Nurses represented a variety of specialties, educational levels, and organizational leadership experiences. The generational span was broad with some nurses having a few years of service to those with decades of professional service. However, each one of us readily identified the power and responsibility that we held to advocate on the 'Hill' for our profession and healthcare system. You can't do the job unless you have the necessary tools and education – NIWI provide us with those necessary implements!

After our day on the Capital Hill, we reconvened to talk of our experiences and our future roles. The room was full of excitement and positive comments of our experiences with their respective representatives and staff. Attendees repeatedly remarked on how successful, personally and professionally, the day had been. Many saw this as being directly related to the preparation and guidance of the NIWI panelists and speakers, which I fully agree. Goodbyes and thanks were expressed and we departed to our various states and organizations.

Although the program concluded, the work has only just begun for each of the attendees. We will continue to hone our skills and abilities to serve as advocates for our profession with state and national representatives. We all took 'nuggets' home with us. I took the nugget that we must develop relationships with our legislators and staff – change cannot and does not occur overnight. Having a professional relationship will allow our voices to be heard over the years to come.