

Participating in the Nurse in Washington Internship (NIWI) provided me with a great insight as to how much impact nurses can have if only we would use our voices collectively! Attending the three day conference was a great opportunity to hear other nurses share their desires to see Washington's lawmakers listen to the frontline healthcare worker. It is important that the lawmakers pass bills that will ensure adequate nursing coverage to meet the increased demand for more nurses while ensuring a stable workforce for the future.

The panelists that were brought in by the organizers of the NIWI conference were engaged with the attendees and shared their perspectives of what they do as assistants to our lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Knowing in advance on how we should plan our approach to ask for support from our US Senator's and Congressional Representatives actually made the appearance on Capitol Hill much easier for me. We were provided with the information on the three "asks" that we needed to convince our Senator and Representative to support in this Legislative year. Opportunity to ask questions and to role play different scenarios during the second day helped each of us decide on what our own approach would be once we were in the spotlight with our own lawmaker or their representative.

On the final day, we were given the opportunity to visit Capitol Hill to talk with our Congressman or Senator. I went to Capitol Hill with the list of "asks" in hand, anxious to talk with WV's two Senators, Joe Manchin and Shelly Moore Capito. The three topics I discussed included ***Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development***, which is very important to every community and to all Americans. This funding has been in effect for over 50 years and helps meet the demand for Registered Nurses and Advanced Practice RNs by providing funding for education, academic institutions and nursing faculty. The second issue was the request for an increase in funding for ***Nursing Research***. The National Institute for Nursing Research provides funding for nurses to complete scientific research to improve the health of all American's through grants, research training, and interdisciplinary collaborations. The last request was to garner support for efforts of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to recognize the ***Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) as a full practice provider***. Enabling the APRN to be permitted to practice to the fullest extent of their education will help ensure that our veterans have an increased access to healthcare providers and help decrease the backlog being seen in today's VHA system.

The meetings took a very short time and although I never actually got to meet with either of the Senators themselves, their Legislative Assistants' were very pleasant and helpful. I thoroughly enjoyed learning the process and having the opportunity to meet with individuals who help make a difference every day in the lives of all Americans. Time will only tell if our efforts to garner support for nurses across America will come to light, but in the meantime, every nurse needs to be aware of the political process and to get involved to ensure that change happens.

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