

“Let us never consider ourselves finished nurses. We must be learning all of our lives.”

These words of Florence Nightingale remind us that, as nurses, we have the responsibility to explore the vast possibilities of the nursing profession. The Nurse In Washington Internship (NIWI) allowed me to explore these possibilities in my own nursing practice . Sponsored by the Nursing Organizations Alliance (NOA), this three-day internship in Washington D.C. aims to empower nurses from a variety of specialties and backgrounds with the knowledge and understanding of the policy realm. Nurses represent the largest proportion of the country’s health care workforce, and therefore have the responsibility to leverage their professional experience to influence health policies at community, state and federal levels. Our voices have never been more needed, because numerous policy proposals threaten our patients’ health care coverage and access. As a graduate student currently studying Health Policy at the University of California-San Francisco, and as a member of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), my primary goal for attending the conference was to gain tools to better navigate the policy arena.

During the first 2 days of NIWI, we had the opportunity to network with nursing professionals from a variety of specialties from across the United States. We also had the opportunity to hear from professional nurse advocates and congressional staff who were able to brief us on health policy bills currently being introduced in Congress and discuss effective ways to advocate for nursing-specific legislation on Capitol Hill.

Furthermore, we were able to attend helpful workshops that raised further awareness of nurse advocacy and policy opportunities on the local, state, and federal level.



On the third and final day of NIWI, we had the opportunity to visit Capitol Hill. During our preparation for NIWI, we were given helpful guidance in how to schedule meetings with our members of Congress to discuss some current healthcare issues. We met with the offices of Sen. Diane Feinstein, D-Calif., Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., and Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., to advocate for reauthorization of Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs. This bipartisan legislation supports the expansion and diversity of the nursing workforce to help address nursing shortages in the U.S., especially in rural and underserved areas. Furthermore, it supports advanced nursing education, nurse workforce diversity, geriatric education, and many other important professional nursing development programs. Such programs are essential to meeting the health care needs of individuals and communities across the U.S., but the current

administration has proposed cutting Title VIII funding by nearly 67 percent in 2020. During our congressional visits, we were able to communicate how ultimately patient care is at risk if America does not act to increase its supply of nurses.



Altogether, I walked away from the NWI experience with an improved understanding of healthcare policy, as well as a greater confidence in approaching legislators to request support for the nursing profession. I look forward to taking what I have learned from this opportunity and encouraging other nursing professionals to get involved in policy and advocacy work. Nurses are a vital voice for better American health, and by joining together we can create positive change for our diverse patient populations.

