

## My NIWI Experience

By Alfredo Mireles, Jr.

By definition, nurses are patient advocates. However, sometimes our patient advocacy needs to be expressed in less conventional ways. I learned this first hand as a scholarship recipient of the Nurse in Washington Internship. During the NIWI conference nurses are equipped with the knowledge, strategy, and courage to advocate for our patients in the United States Capital. The NIWI program is also a great opportunity to network with nurse leaders from all over the country and gain invaluable insight from their experiences. Overall, I benefited greatly from the Nurse in Washington Internship and am ready to apply the knowledge I gained to advocate for my patients better.

Before NIWI I was active in San Francisco health policy advocacy. As a nurse at publicly funded hospital I realized the importance of advocating for my patients on the political level. I lead the fight against the closing of an inpatient psychiatric ward at San Francisco General Hospital, and have been fighting for my patients ever since. This work also made me realize how important it is for nurses to have policy savvy, so I enrolled in a Master's in Health Policy program at the University of California at San Francisco. My advocacy work, strengthened by my policy education, is making me better able to lobby on my patients behalf.

Since NIWI I have had some wonderful opportunities where I will get to use my NIWI strengthened skills in new settings. I was chosen to be a Paul Ambrose Scholar, which entails another trip to D.C.. As a Paul Ambrose Scholar, I will get a chance to meet other health science student leaders from all over the country as well as be treated to three days of lectures from national public health officials. I was also recently selected to be a Jessie Marvin Unruh California Assembly Fellow. In this capacity, I will work in a legislator's office for a year, be mentored by program staff, and participate in twelve units of graduate education seminars. The NIWI scholarship committee was the first organization that believed in me, and saw that I was committed to working at the intersection of public policy and health care.

My experiences at NIWI were a great first foray in to health advocacy on the national level. I feel grateful to have had this opportunity and I cannot recommend this program more. Personally, I hope to take what I learned at NIWI, as well as other politics/policy fellowships, and to one day run for office. I feel that the ultimate patient advocacy happens on the policy level, thus it is our duty as nurses to be leaders in health policy formulation.