

2011 Scholarship Recipient's Report
Melanie Byrd Hollar, RN BSN OCN

I am very grateful to The Alliance, Elsevier/Saunders, and the editors of *Policy and Politics in Nursing and Health Care* for their support in helping me attend the Nurse in Washington Internship (NIWI) March 13-15, 2011. Healthcare is a hot topic across our Country especially in Washington, DC right now. The experience at NIWI helped me grow professionally as an Oncology Certified Nurse as well as personally as a constituent exercising my first amendment right to lobby issues of concern and interest to me.

NIWI allowed me the opportunity to network with nursing colleagues from across the Country whose passion is like mine of being an advocate for our profession as well as our patients. Nurses are on the frontline of healthcare. At NIWI, I spent time with experts in healthcare policy, received training and information from those currently working on Capitol Hill on our behalf, and heard from the staffers in the offices of our Representatives in Congress.

NIWI staff shared information and training with us and identified common "asks" during visits to Capitol Hill as we prepared to meet with House Representatives and Senators from our State. These common "asks" were

- Support \$313 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 for the Nursing Workforce and Development programs at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).
- Support \$162 million FY 2012 appropriations funding for the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR).
- Show support for nurses by placing a statement in the Congressional Record about the importance of the nursing profession to the health care delivery system.

Attending NIWI as a member of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), I was able to meet and work with other oncology nurses attending NIWI to help progress ONS' healthcare agenda including asking my State Congresswoman to cosponsor the "Improving Cancer Treatment Education Act of 2011."

Upon returning from NIWI, my plans for utilizing the knowledge and experience I gained from other health care policy experts and colleagues is to empower the members of my local Oncology Nursing Society Chapter to become involved locally and nationally in the legislative process, utilizing the tools learned at NIWI. I am currently the Chair of the Government Relations Committee for the chapter and am presently in the process of scheduling visits to the local offices of our House Representative and Senators. I am organizing a group of oncology nurses to go to these offices to discuss common "asks" as mentioned above and other agenda items. I am working with the Oncology Nursing Society to further guide us in our visits. I have shared some of the information and tools I learned at NIWI to my local Oncology Nursing Chapter.

I plan to mentor more nurses in my workplace as well as my community to become involved in the legislation process. I have encouraged colleagues and chapter members to attend NIWI in the future. I have been interviewed by the local newspaper in my community about the experience at NIWI. I will also be featured in the monthly magazine, *All About Women* in May sharing my involvement in NIWI and the role of politics in my life.

Seventy-five nurses from twenty-nine states were represented at NIWI. Each person met with their state representatives about nursing issues. Walking up the steps to Capitol Hill empowered me as an individual to know I can make a difference by being one voice. I was enlightened to the legislation process and the necessary steps to achieve a legislative agenda for the nursing profession. I was impressed with the Staff in each of the Representatives offices that we met with. The Staffers were very knowledgeable about issues facing nurses including the nursing shortages and lack of funding for nursing research and education. One of the Staffers my group met with was a Nurse Practitioner who played a key role in supporting the nursing profession's agenda with this Senator. The opportunity to meet with Congresswoman Foxx about my profession energized me to realize these representatives want to hear from the public about programs that are important to people. As budget cuts are inevitable, Representatives find it much easier to cut those programs that they never hear from anyone about. In the visits with Congresswoman Foxx and the Staffers from Senators Burr and Hagan, we were asked to follow up with their offices with concerns and requests in the future; we were told how the representatives liked to be contacted and what is the best way to get recognition of the agenda. Congresswoman Foxx shared, "I like to receive personal letters about personal experiences and why something is important to you." She stated that she will respond to personal letters as she knows if someone takes the time to write a personal letter with a personal experience then the topic must be of importance. In the past, I have been involved in the petitions and the generic letters to Congress but after my experience at NIWI, I now know the tools to communicate with my Representatives.

As a result of my experience at NIWI, I am pursuing opportunities within my national organization (ONS) to become more involved with them in advocating for nurses especially oncology nurses. I have presented myself to be a volunteer for the organization to become more involved in healthcare policy and advocacy. I am also pursuing an opportunity with the American Cancer Society's advocacy program. I will be potentially traveling back to Capitol Hill with a local group from my community in 2012 advocating for cancer legislation. Nurses are on the frontline of healthcare and we can make a difference in the future of our profession and the lives of our patients' one voice at a time.

A highlight of the NIWI experience was getting to meet the editors of the book, *Policy and Politics in Nursing and Health Care*. Diana J. Mason, Judith K. Leavitt, and Mary W. Chaffee are experts in health care policy and these ladies shared information and their knowledge with the attendees. After hearing them speak, we were given the privilege to purchase the book and speak with each one of them as they signed our copy. I also have been given the opportunity to network with Ms. Leavitt as she resides in my state and has

presented the opportunity to mentor me in the future with health care policy. I look forward to future opportunities that will arise from the many networks available through NIWI.

Thank you for this experience at NIWI and the gracious scholarship. As a first-time attendee, I highly recommend every nurse in every specialty area to attend as nurses are a powerful voice with Congress and the experience at NIWI will empower you to become that powerful voice with expert knowledge and tools.