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Nursing Organization Alliance  
201 E. Main St., Suite 1401  
Lexington, KY 40507

Elsevier/Saunders Nurse in Washington Scholarship

As I reflect on my experience of the 2009 Nurse In Washington Internship, I am so appreciative for the opportunity provided by the scholarship. The investment by the Nursing Organization Alliance and Elsevier/Saunders in NIWI has and will continue to have a positive impact on health policy and nursing leadership at all levels. I was thrilled to be awarded the full scholarship for 2009. I became aware of NIWI, out of frustration after being engaged in nursing advocacy and health policy in my home state for a number of years and having some setbacks in the area of advanced practice.

The NIWI conference taps into the same knowledge and skill set, that expert nurses use every day in patient advocacy and leadership. Listening to and interacting with the legislative assistants and the nurse health policy experts was an invaluable experience. Having other nurses tell their lived experience of being advocates at the grassroots level was a highlight for me. It was encouraging hearing other nurses that have successfully navigated through and influenced health policy at the local, regional and national level. I was inspired and reassured that although the challenges and obstacles may be great, that the efforts of a few dedicated professionals can have a profound and far-reaching effect.

My goals for attending this conference included gaining a better understanding of the federal legislative process, networking with nurse health policy experts, and obtaining ideas for grassroots advocacy. The Nurse in Washington Internship met and exceeded all of my expectations. The readings and conference calls on the legislative and budget process were very timely, in light of the discussions on health care reform this year. Meeting and exchanging ideas and challenges with nursing leaders from other states provided me with creative solutions take back to my state. The information I obtained during NIWI has already proven beneficial. I have been able to share this information with other nurse leaders, and as a result, one of my colleagues traveled to Washington this week and met with our senator's staff and other nursing lobbyists on the medical home initiative.

I would highly recommend this conference to any nurse interested in health policy, legislation and patient advocacy. Again, it was an honor and a privilege to be the 2009 NIWI scholarship recipient.

Sincerely,

Julie Thibodaux, APN, CPNP  
Arkansas Nurses Association

## **Goal Statement**

I will use the knowledge gained from NIWI in my practice, my nursing organizations, and my profession. I am a pediatric nurse practitioner employed full time at a Federally Qualified Community Health Center in Northwest Arkansas. We serve a unique population of health care consumers. A majority of my patients are non English speaking. We serve a large Hispanic population, as well as the largest population of Marshallese living outside of the Marshall Islands. Our patients often lack basic resources needed to provide for their families, especially resources that are needed for health care and preventive services. More often, these families are in healthcare crisis. Federal and state health policy and funding sources have a direct impact on the types of health care services that I am able to provide in this setting. The NIWI experience will provide me with ideas, techniques and guidelines for initiating and organizing local legislative efforts to possibly change and restructure health policy to better meet the needs of our patients in the community health setting.

The NIWI will have a direct impact on my activities within the Arkansas Nurses Association. For the last four years I have been on the executive council of Advance Practice Nurses for ArNA. Along with ArNA Health Policy Committee, the APN council has been directly involved with all legislative issues related to Advance Practice Nursing. As our state has legislative sessions every two years, the knowledge I gain from the NIWI will help me to work with our Health Policy Committee as we enter into a legislative session in 2009. Specifically, our committee is looking at grassroots organization of RN's and APN's with practice issues and access to affordable healthcare for uninsured and underinsured patients.

I am most interested in learning how to empower professional nurses to contribute, both with time and financial resources to work with legislators and health policy leaders to advance healthcare legislation in our state. Ultimately, I am interested in running for a district House of Representatives seat in my district and would like to encourage other nurses to do so as well. I want to encourage nurses to be active in all levels of government. I will disseminate the knowledge gained from the NIWI experience both at the district and the state level in focus sessions and as part of continuing education sessions both for registered and advance practice nurses in Arkansas. The Arkansas Nurses Association is currently developing health policy and legislative workshops and my experience with NIWI will enable me to contribute to these educational sessions as well.

## **Previous Policy and Government Affairs Activities**

I have been involved with local and state nursing and health policy issues for many years. Over the previous three years, I have been most active in my role as secretary of the APN council of the Arkansas Nurses Association. I have worked directly with our health policy committee and the ArNA lobbyist on many issues over the past three years related to nursing practice. In 2006, we were able to defeat proposed legislation that would have limited the scope and ability of nurse practitioners to provide care for patients in Arkansas. Over the last 6 months, our APN council has worked with lobbyist from several nursing and healthcare organizations to prevent a proposed rule change of the state medical board which would have severely limited an APN's ability to provide care and prevent access to primary care for many Arkansas. I provided testimony both to the medical board and to legislators regarding this issue in the last two months.

### **Professional Activities**

I have had the privilege of being involved in many local, state, national and international professional nursing and healthcare organizations and activities over the last three years. In 2006, I completed a two year mentoring program through Sigma Theta Tau International, call the Omada Board mentoring program. I was paired with the board president of the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools for a two year term. I was able to participate in an international "think tank" on nursing migration issues. As part of the Board mentoring program we had monthly conference calls, readings and other assignments on the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of non profit boards. In 2006, I began a two year "mini" fellowship in pediatric and adolescent psychotropic medications use as part of a pilot program through Columbia University. I am still a participant in this program through the newly formed REACH institute which was founded to increase access to mental health care for the pediatric population. On the local level, I am current president of Pi Theta Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau, and I organize medical mission trips to Colombia, Peru and Uganda through Central United Methodist Church. And, one of my greatest passions is working as a volunteer nurse at a summer camp for children with special needs; Camp Barnabas in Purdy Missouri.

Thank You

Julie Thibodaux, RN, APN, CPNP