I have been an oncology nurse for 31 years. I have always advocated for my patients at the bedside, but never really considered the need to move outside of that arena. In June 2016, I was fortunate to attend the Cancer Moonshot Summit with Past Vice President Joe Biden and was enlightened and empowered to advocate for my patients beyond the bedside.

I had the energy, I just didn’t know how or where to start. I was made aware of the Nurse In Washington Internship (NIWI) through the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and decided that this venue was the way to learn how to become an activist in the political environment. So, I applied for the scholarship and was fortunate to receive.

My hesitation was how and what to say to legislators. I have the knowledge and the experience, but where do I start? NIWI was just what I needed to propel me forward. I learned how to request meetings, what to “ask for”, how to set the tone, deliver my message and then follow up to continue that collaborative effort.

Nurses have been identified as the most trusted and honest profession for the last 15 years. We have experience, stories, information and determination to provide the best care for our patients and we need to be heard. Understanding that nurses are experts in our arena, people will listen. This is a strategic way to think about how to handle your meetings. Attending NIWI affirmed that for me.

During the NIWI conference we heard from Representative Gale Adcock, a legislative assistant, health policy advocate and a Robert Wood Internship Nurse who had firsthand experience in the trenches of legislative policy. This was especially helpful for me. Learning about the daily ins and outs of everyday policy and decision-making shed light on politics and provided some key points on how to maneuver in this unknown territory.
As we were meeting in March the weather was a looming factor for us. A large storm was predicted for Washington D.C. and many of the meetings were canceled. There were numerous nurses from Maryland attending and even though we had not met prior, we connected due to NIWI having us meet with our state attendees. Many of us Marylanders left due to the cancellations, but we made electronic connections and vowed to come back to D.C.

On April 4th we reconnected, traveled on a train and were able to meet with Congressman Raskin’s legislative assistant, Senator Cardin’s office, attend “Road to Cancer Survivorship” panel discussion as well as meet with the Robert Wood Nurse that lectured at the NIWI conference. What a wonderful experience. Because of NIWI, I learned, networked, made new friends, advocated for my patients and stepped out of my comfort zone. I am writing about my NIWI experience in our hospital’s application for re-designation for Magnet, as well as following up with the relationships that I have already established. Thanks NIWI for giving me the skill to advocate for my patients at a legislative level.

Left to Right: Nancy Corbitt, Julie Williams, Alexandra Menardy (Senator Cardin’s assistant) & Vinciya Pandian

Nancy Corbitt