I was one of two recipients of the full scholarship from The Alliance, to attend the Nurse in Washington Internship on March 6-8, 2016. It was an honor to win the scholarship and represent both The Alliance and the American Academy of Ambulatory Nursing or AAACN.

There were more than 70 conference participants from a variety of backgrounds such as school nursing, oncology, ambulatory care, veteran’s administration, and medical-surgical nursing. The participants were advanced practice nurses, registered nurses or student registered nurses. We represented 29 different states from Hawaii to Massachusetts. We were able to network and discuss the common, as well as the unique challenges in nursing we each faced.

The NIWI testimonials from different nurse advocates provided real insight to the influence that nursing as a whole and individuals can have. The different sessions provided the process for the Capitol Hill visits, as well as support to NIWI participants. Most of all, I understood how my voice could contribute to the voice of nursing.

NIWI presented me with an opportunity to share my experience on Capitol Hill with AAACN members and gave me real insight to process of advocating for my profession, my nursing organization and the patients I care for. I learned that lobbying was essentially getting what you are asking for and the main way for nursing to get what they want is to educate legislators about what the nursing profession and healthcare really needs. I learned through my Capitol Hill visits that constituent meetings are the most important type of communication you can have with your legislators.

I really enjoyed the “shout backs” after the Hill visits. It was an opportunity to hear about the other nurse’s visits with legislators. I personally enjoyed being part of a visit with Carrie Swope, the Senior Legislative Assistant to Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas. Ms. Swope spent 45 minutes with us. We were able to cover all the “asks”, as well as other hot topics in nursing such as, violence in the workplace and safe staffing. We had been told any meeting over 10 minutes was a good meeting, but we did not expect 45 minutes. I left that meeting feeling like I accomplished something, even if the only accomplishment was my nursing voice being listened to by someone who works in the legislative arena.

Since returning from NIWI, I have written an article for the ViewPoint. This is the publication for the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing. I shared my NIWI experience in these articles and encouraged others to advocate for nursing by attending NIWI. I will also be presenting a poster at national conference May 18-20 in Palm Springs, California. The poster focuses on grassroot advocating and includes some lessons learned from my experience at NIWI. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity, as this has only sparked my interest more in being a nurse advocate.