

COMMUNICATING & CONNECTING

GUIDELINES FOR GRASSROOTS LOBBYING

WHY COMMUNICATE WITH LEGISLATORS?

As a registered nurse, our scope of practice is based on three major factors: Competence, Employment and Laws.

LAWS

Our day-to-day practice as an RN, regardless of what we do or where we practice, is based on established laws and regulations. Keeping with this thought, we need to ask ourselves who creates these laws and why is this important to our scope of practice? The answer to the first question is that legislators create the laws. The answer to the second question needs further examination. Because it is legislators who pass and enact laws, we need to explore how many of our legislators have a health care background and how many are RNs? The answer to both of these questions is very few. Yet we see decisions being made about health care delivery, funding and workforce that have little input from RNs.

As nurses we have been called the “heartbeat of the health care system.” We have been identified as the “most trusted profession.” We have heard that if nursing as a united voice unleashed our power, we could get things done. So maybe this is the time to empower our collective voice one step at a time. In other words, we as nurses need to move from a behavior of indifference and complacency to active involvement through grassroots lobbying.

GRASSROOTS LOBBYING

Grassroots lobbying is simply the art of communicating with your elected officials on issues that are important to you.

INFLUENCING DECISION MAKING ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

One of the easiest and most effective ways of influencing legislation is through timely and purposeful communication with your legislator. In Wisconsin you have two representatives, a senator and an assembly person. They will listen to you because you vote. When a health care related legislative bill impacting nursing practice or patient care is brought to your attention this would be the time to contact your legislator.

TIPS ON MEETING WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

A face-to-face meeting is an effective way to get to know your legislator. It is a great way for you to be his/her resource about nursing and health care issues.

- Dress code is business or business casual attire.
- Be on time and courteous.
- Your face-to-face visit may be only 15 minutes so establish a quick rapport, but use your time to explain the purpose of your visit and what you are asking for.
- If your legislator is not available, you will more than likely meet with a legislative staff person. These folks are very informed on the issue so be courteous and present the same information that you would be sharing with your legislator.
- Talk with your legislator or the staff person using words and language understood by the average person. Use of nursing jargon can cause confusion and detract from the issue at hand.
- Avoid looking at your notes, maintain eye contact and do not interrupt. Provide no more than three talking points/reasons as to why you want your legislator to vote your way.
- Ask about his/her opinion now that you have provided important information.
- Make sure you leave talking points and other materials that will fortify your explanation.
- Thank him/her for meeting with you and express your availability for any questions.
- Send a thank you note to reinforce your commitment to your issue.

NURSES DAY — AT THE — CAPITOL

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