

## **45th Biennial Convention (16-20 November 2019)**

### **Connect. Collaborate. Catalyze. Health Policy, Political Presence, and Nursing...Essential Skills to Positively Impact Healthcare**

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The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses Provision 9 calls for nurses individually, and through professional associations, to be actively involved as advocates for health care policy and social reform. In this context, advocacy refers to leading professional nurses in practice inclusive of political involvement. Yet, few nurse leaders look to political presence and action as a method of advocacy. Without nursing involvement, legislation enacted will continue to challenge nursing practice. Now, more than ever, nurse's political voice needs to be heard. Legislation, inclusive of health care reform, scope of practice, and patient care issues that directly impact nursing care are enacted or discussed on a daily basis. Nurses are in a pivotal position to advocate for health policy by addressing critical issues that jeopardize our current health care system and professional practice.

Limited research studies have suggested that health policy education, mentoring, and practical experience and leadership are essential components to improve professional nursing's participation in the political and health policy realm. Recognition and taking action on issues using critical expertise, political knowledge, and experience within the health policy domain are necessary to positively impact legislation improving our nation's health care and advancement of nursing practice.

A comparison phenomenological study was completed between professional staff nurses who have had an undergraduate course on health policy and nurses in a formal leadership position. Research identified five overarching themes: 1). Education as a Foundation to Political Advocacy, 2). Health Policy Involvement, 3). Perceived Barriers to Political Involvement, 4). Academia and Nursing leadership Leading the Way, and 5). Benefits of Professional Nursing Organizations.

Results indicated that health policy education was a valued skill set. To be a politically active leader, there is a need for improved collaboration between academia, nursing leadership, and professional nursing organizations. In doing so, nurses will spearhead new and meaningful ways of approaching health policy and political action within the discipline of nursing.

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#### **Title:**

Connect. Collaborate. Catalyze. Health Policy, Political Presence, and Nursing...Essential Skills to Positively Impact Healthcare

#### **Keywords:**

Health Policy, Nurse Advocate and Political Emersion

#### **References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

Nurses are in a pivotal position to advocate for health policy by addressing critical issues that jeopardize our health care system and professional practice. Participants will recognize that health policy education, mentoring, experience, collaboration, and leadership skills are essential components to improve participation in the political and health policy realm.

### **Content Outline:**

#### **Objectives**

- Identify factors that influence political involvement and motivation.
- Synthesize findings on issues that adversely affect health policy/political involvement of nurses.
- Utilize political voice on issues that impact the nursing profession and patient care.

#### **Background**

- The American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics for Nurses Provision 9 calls for nurses individually, and through professional associations, to be actively involved as advocates for health care policy and social reform (American Nurses Association, 2015; Fowler, 2015).
- Limited political research points to the lack of education about health policy and political involvement contributing to the lack of political activity within the nursing profession (Byrd et al. 2012; Cramer, 2002; Montgomery, 2012; McGuire, Goldstein, Claywell, & Patton, 2016).
- Health policy and political emersion amongst professional nurses inclusive of nurse leaders is often understated, yet it is an integral part of professional practice.

- There are over 2.9 million registered nurses (RN's) employed in the United States (United States Department of Labor, 2017).
- Yet, registered nurses, inclusive of nurse leaders, are historically absent in the health policy/political arena.
- Without nursing's voice, legislation, regulations, and policies will continue to direct professional practice, care delivery, reimbursement, and nursing leadership initiatives.
- Educators, professional nurses, and nurse leaders are in a pivotal position to address critical issues that jeopardize the current health care system and professional practice.
- Health Care policies affect almost every aspect of a nurse's professional life, our voice is needed and appreciated!

### **Research Design**

- A comparison phenomenological study inclusive of registered nurses and nurse leaders, specific to their undergraduate preparation and level of political involvement, was conducted.
- Research questions were developed to:
  - Determine the level of political involvement and political knowledge/ expertise of nurse leaders.
  - Determine the impact an undergraduate baccalaureate level nursing course in health policy and political involvement had on registered nurses ongoing political knowledge and involvement.
  - Demographic data inclusive of gender, age, highest educational level, ethnicity, employment, state of licensure/residence, employment, and political affiliations were obtained.

### **Sample**

#### ***Study 1: Registered Nurses***

- A purposive sample of registered nurses with 4 years of nursing experience who completed an undergraduate health policy course were utilized.
- Patricia Benner's *From Novice to Expert* theory (2001) guided selection criteria for this study.

#### ***Study 2: Registered Nurse Leaders***

- A purposive random sampling of Nurse Managers to Chief Nursing Officers was obtained utilizing members of a national professional nursing leadership organization.
- Sample representation included nurse leaders from 49 states and the District of Columbia.

### **Themes**

#### ***Education as a Foundation to Political Advocacy***

- **Registered Nurses:** "Having that [health policy] in my education prepared me to be confident in making decisions and being a part of nursing politics in my career." "I don't think I really realized until I started working... how much political policy affects our profession, so I think that being more aware of that going into nursing is really important."
- **Nurse Leaders:** "Not in my comfort zone, never prepared about the process." "I don't know how to make a difference." "I don't have the knowledge to proceed."

#### ***Health Policy Involvement***

- **Registered Nurses:** "I am a member of the integrated council, where we can see how to make changes and improve outcomes...it is mostly focused on quality and quality

improvement.” “It is something that makes a difference so in that perspective, it makes it easy for me to get in there and be involved.”

- **Nurse Leaders:** “I am very involved with constant vigilance of legislation impacting nursing.”

### ***Perceived Barriers to Political Involvement***

- **Three Subthemes: Time, Fear of Retribution, and Lack of Information.**
- **Registered Nurses:** *Time:* “Simply put...time.” *Fear of Retribution:* “We need to have empowerment to speak up without fear of reprimand.” *Lack of Information:* “You know, every annual review you sit down with your manager and see what you’re interested in getting involved with. I think that it is simply getting the information out there to get more nurses involved. There is just not enough ‘staffertizing’ out there so to speak.”
- **Nurse Leaders:** *Time:* “Time... I have to find some balance between my profession and home life.” “With regard to political involvement, it is simply not a priority within the paradigm of daily events and responsibilities.” *Fear of Retribution:* “My place of work expects its leadership team to support their political stance --- this has not been a conflict yet, but I am cautious over what I support and how.” “Repercussions.” *Lack of Information:* “Access to information.”

### ***Academia and Nursing leadership Leading the Way***

- **Registered Nurses:** ““I think that educating nurses that their voices matter and teach them the steps that they would have to go through to make a difference.” “I just don’t think there is enough information and education out there that lets nurses know like HEY, you have a voice and you can be different and you can change policies.” Taking a health policy course provided a stepping stone.”
- **Nurse Leaders:** “We need involvement to increase public awareness.” “the process of involvement can foster empowerment.” “Health policy is markedly important for professional growth and for the development of healthcare.” “Being involved helps shape the future of nursing.”

### ***Benefits of Professional Organizations***

- **Registered Nurses:** “Provides resources from those who are involved.” “It would helpful if they were willing to be mentors and guide us to get on the bandwagon,” “We lack appreciation until we have seen it in real life, you know what I mean? It’s like clinical experience. We don’t appreciate it till we are out there.”
- **Nurse Leaders:** “Professional organizations keep me informed of pending change that affect nursing practice and corporate policy.” “Having information is extremely important to me so I can work through government relations staff at my hospital, the information also helps me to personally respond to issues affecting nursing and healthcare in general.” “Allows me to express my views politically without feeling constrained.” “Provides connectiveness.”

### ***Recommendations***

- **Nursing Education:**
  - Immersion in health policy/political arenas is crucial to preparing nurses for ongoing involvement.
  - Registered nurses need to be knowledgeable of legislation, Department of Health, and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Board of Nursing changes that could affect their practice and patient care.

- Utilize nurse educators and nurse leaders with an active interest and experience within the health care policy arena to provide guidance, resources, information, and educational opportunities.
- **Mentoring:**
  - Established civically active nurses and nurse leaders needed to assist in the development of politically savvy nurses.
  - Incorporate a Health Policy Council within your organization utilizing community resources to assist in the development of politically responsible nurses.
- **Collaboration with Academia, Professional Nursing Organizations, and Nurse Leaders:**
  - Together nursing organizations, nurse leaders, and academia can work in harmony to augment learning, spearheading interest to foster active involvement by paving the way for change.
  - Utilize memberships to the fullest extent to promote political advocacy.
  - Work collectively to eliminate barriers and promote change.
- **Conclusion**
  - Health policy education and mentoring is critical to the development of politically astute and active nurses.
  - Without nursing and professional nursing organization involvement, legislation enacted at the local, state, and federal levels will continue to be enacted that affect nursing practice, reimbursement, and patient care.
  - It is essential to remove organizational barriers and fear for nurses to take initiative to be the driving force for change.

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**Author Summary:** Carol Amann is an assistant professor at Gannon University, She has presented original research related to gerontology and health policy internationally, nationally, and state wide. She is a member of the interdisciplinary research team incorporating multiple healthcare domains working collaboratively for improved communication, patient safety, and outcomes.