Developing Excitement about Political Activism

Michelle S. Ficca, PhD, RN

Bloomsburg University
Bloomsburg, PA
Challenge

- Lack of student understanding of the political process and health policy impact on patients
- Lack of student enthusiasm related to the political process
GOALS:
Understand the political process and its use in nursing practice and health policy
Awareness of the impact of the political process and health policy on clients
Advocate for the health of the people of the nation, state, and local area
In the beginning . . . .

- Nightingale
  - Aimed to use the lessons taught by war to prepare and influence Parliament and the military

- Walker and Choate (1984)
  - Nurses’ lack of political impact may be attributed to the lack of socialization in the educational process focusing on nurses as policymakers
And throughout time

- **Institute of Medicine report (2010)**
  - Nurses need “to ensure the delivery of safe, patient-centered care across settings..... Patient needs have become more complicated, and nurses need to attain requisite competencies.....These competencies include leadership, health policy, system improvement, research and evidence-based practice, and teamwork and collaboration.....”
Recommendations from Professional Organizations

- American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)
- National League for Nursing (NLN)
- American Nurses Association (ANA)
- National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculty (NONPF)
Responses from Students

• Our Experiences
  – Discomfort
  – Lack of exposure
  – “Dull”
  – Lack of awareness of responsibilities as a nurse
  – Lack of knowledge
Conclusions

• It is essential for professional practice for nurses and students in nursing to understand the political process, legislation, and health policy in order to be a change agent and advocate for our patients

• “Everything is political”

• Participation and enacting change is viewed as difficult
The Curriculum

Sophomore and Junior Years

- **Focus:** state legislation and health policy that impacts individuals and families

- **Courses:**
  - Class time and material devoted to the political process and professional communication
Focus is integration of sociocultural, ethnic, legal, political, and economic principles into the health care of developing families and adults

Assignment: letter to legislator addressing an issue of adults, women, or children
Senior Year

- **Focus** – *federal legislation and health policy, health care delivery, and economics; public health policy and impact on communities*

- **Courses**
  - Class time and material devoted to federal legislative process;
    - Assignment: health policy analysis and letter to federal legislator
  - Assessment of a community
    - Development of an intervention to meet the needs of the community
Class time and activities related to political advocacy, health policy development, and the nursing leadership role

- Assignment: analysis of their individual and collective role in interactions with legislators
• **Visit to Washington, D.C.** - focus on participation in the political process and health policy development

  - **Assignment:** meetings with professional nursing organizations and lobbyists; meetings with federal agencies; meetings with students’ legislators and health policy aides
Graduate Level

• Focus is on direct involvement in professional organizations and actively participating in influencing health policy development/change
  – Students attend Lobby Day at the state level; professional organizations’ national meetings; Day on the Hill
• Focus is on the assessment and identification of needs of the community
  - Based on assessment data, students identify areas of concern and develop plans to address the concerns in collaboration with local governments/agencies
Opportunities

- Progressive knowledge about the political process and how policy impacts individuals, families, aggregates, and communities
- Direct observation of the process
- Enthusiasm and excitement
- Civically engaged as a nurse and a citizen
Recommendations

• Integrate the political advocacy focus throughout the curriculum
• Establish and maintain contact with legislators and legislator’s aides
• Debriefing session
• Faculty role-modeling
• Excitement and enthusiasm rub off!!
Questions