



Political Advocacy: A Professional Responsibility for Nurses

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Session Objectives: The learner will:

- Articulate the role responsibility of nursing professionals as guided by professional standards and the code of ethics.
- Clarify the importance of political advocacy to patient safety.
- Outline educational strategies used to prepare nursing students to act as political advocates



Patient advocacy

Social responsibility of nurses is outlined in the code of ethics and professional standards:

- Code of Ethics, Provision 3 states a nurse promotes, advocates for & protects patient rights, health & safety (ANA, 2015).
- Professional standards provides guidelines related to professional values:
 - a) dignity implies a respect for others
 - b) altruism a concern for the welfare of others
 - c) social justice to uphold legal & moral principles for others.



Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice

Essential V & VII:

- Require the development of political self-efficacy, competency and citizenship to influence health policy that promotes equity in health care access and outcomes (AACN, 2008).
- Provides educational standards to promote professional nursing values such as the core concepts of altruism, advocacy, dignity and social reform (Leners, Roehrs, & Piccone, 2006)



Political Advocacy

Advocacy is derived from a Latin word *advocatus* - to plead the cause of another. Political advocacy links the legislative arena with social justice

A critical component of professional nursing practice:

- Patient vulnerability
- Complexity of the healthcare system
- Patient rights and self-determination (Hahn, 2010)
- Social justice - access to resources across all populations is equitable through the promotion of a just society (Vliem, 2015).





Nursing Advocates

Some examples (D'Antonio, et al., 2010)

Nightingale: utilized the media and data to inform the public of the conditions endured by soldiers in Crimea to gain needed resources.

Sanger: advocated for women's rights at a time when legislation prohibited the discussions resulting in founding planned parenthood.

Dix: advocated for the mentally ill which resulted in protective legislation for this vulnerable group.

Aiken: Research has led to policy related to nurse staffing
(Aiken et al., 2002).





Impact of Political Processes to Practice & Healthcare Organizations

Overall nursing influence on health policy has been minimal (D'Antonio, et al., 2010), despite a professional requirement, and legislative actions that impact nursing education, practice and research.

Examples include:

- The nursing discipline is regulated at the state level
- State legislation directs a) access to care b) staffing decision-making in some states.
- Federal legislation adjusted a) reimbursement structures and b) directs privacy protection of health related information.





Literature Review

- Challenges to Address
- Nurses do not link political advocacy with the professional nursing role (Taft & Nanna, 2008).
- Nurses are hesitant to act due to inadequate educational preparation (Taylor, 2016). As a result nursing's political influence has diminished (McMurray, 2010).
- Social, system and environmental issues perpetuate societal inequities (Mill, Astle, Ogilvie & Gastaldo, 2010; Waite & Brooks, 2014).
- Nursing's informed voice and strategic position at point of care could influence decision making on behalf of society (Primomo & Bjorling, 2013).





Educational Preparation

- Nursing professionals must be empowered through education to engage as advocates
- Nurse professionals must understand the legislative processes to address socioeconomic and environmental concerns. Maryland, M. & Gonzalez, R. (2012).
- Professional identity requires nurses integrate personal with professional values, attitudes, and behaviors (Kava, H., Isak, B., Senyuva, E. & Kaya 2016).



Educational Strategies

Experiential learning can prepare nurses as political advocates. Goals of educational strategies applied included:

1. Engage students in activities of a political advocate and the professional role.
2. Raise awareness how social justice (burdens/benefits experienced) is influenced by race, and culture due to changing community demographics (Tyer-Viola, & Corle, 2009).





Reflective Written Assignments

- The Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Indiana State Nurses Association (ISNA) presented a list of topics discussed in the interim committees (fall) and the health related legislation introduced at the statehouse (Spring).
- Fall & Spring: Students discuss implications of legislation from a consumer/practitioner viewpoint, identify proponents/opponents of a bill, predict its outcome and submit a letter to the legislators stating their stand in favor or against legislation.





Sample: Interim Study Committee Topics

Health

- Goals, benchmarks, and plans to reduce the incidence of diabetes in Indiana, improving diabetes care, and controlling complications associated with diabetes

Corrections and Criminal Code

- Extending mental health and addiction services to more individuals in our criminal justice system

Judiciary and Public Policy

- Whether Indiana should continue to require a license to carry a handgun

Government

- Food deserts

Environmental Affairs

- Lead removal from the public water supply





Guide for an Advocacy Message –

Director of Advocacy and Policy (ISNA)

Introduce yourself

- Establish a connection: constituent, prior meeting
- Establish your expertise

Define your ask

Explain the status quo

- Do not assume prior familiarity

Provide support

- Evidence-based plus a memory anchor

Reinforce your ask





The Privilege Exercise

- Recognize privilege can reinforce/widen gaps r/t access to resources.
- Identify impact of race, culture, upon access to benefits or burdens
- Promote awareness of judgment or bias

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD5f8GuNuGQ>

- Awareness of social justice/disparities
<http://playspent.org>



Discussion of Current Events

Events that Impact Public Health: Access, quality, and health outcomes.

- Hurricane Katrina
- Flint Water Crisis
- Hurricane Harvey and Houston Texas
- Western Wildfires in California, Washington and Oregon
- Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean, Florida, and the southern states.





Invite a Legislator to a Healthcare Setting

A state Senator, chair of the healthcare committee was invited to raise nurse awareness of the importance for political advocacy in the legislative arena and establish a relationship with the legislator.

Processes Involved:

- Secure permission from Nursing Administration
- Involve community relations officer in the planning
- Issue an official invitation from the Chief Nurse Officer of the healthcare agency
- Determine the goal and agenda for the visit: A Day in the Life of a Nurse in Practice.
- Communicate with the Senator's office to arrange a date/time.





Processes





Implications for Nursing Education

- Political advocacy is part of the professional nursing role to support social justice. Requires graduates to be knowledgeable of health related concerns, current legislative proposals and processes.
- Integration of social justice theory within baccalaureate curriculum promotes an “upstream (proactive) versus downstream (reactive)” viewpoint.
- Education is needed to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes required to “speak up” in favor or against legislation that impacts public health.





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