



This column informs members of important legislative issues and health care policy, and encourages political activism. Write to nsna@nsna.org attn: Leg/Ed to contribute ideas.

By Marie Cassels, Director and Chair,
Legislation/Education Committee

Step up!

As nursing students, when we hear the word advocacy, we immediately think about patient advocacy within our scope of practice. But have you ever thought about advocating for the profession itself? Nursing advocacy means standing up, speaking out and empowering ourselves, as well as our patients. If nursing students and nurses are not advocates for the profession then others are free to make decisions on our behalf. Such decisions may not be in the best interest of the profession or our patients. When we surrender decision making capability to others, we are not meeting our own professional responsibility.

Knowledge is the basis for action and change. Looking up relevant local, state, and national nursing issues is a major step in the right direction toward empowerment. I suggest that every nursing student explore their state nurses' association website to find out what current legislative issues are under discussion. Are there issues or legislative events that would benefit from nursing student support and involvement? Contact the legislative program chair and volunteer to help get the word out to other nursing students about the issue or event. Learning about the issues and participating at local or state events will enhance our leadership development as nursing students.

NSNA members should engage in communication with their own legislators. At the state and federal level advocating for issues with representatives or senators other than one's own may require registering with the state as a lobbyist. However, as a constituent you can contact your own legislators (local, state, and federal levels) by email, phone, or a written letter at any time. To identify your U.S. Representative or locate his/her contact information (by your zip code) go to www.house.gov. To write your U.S. Senators and find their contact information (by your State) go to www.senate.gov.

Make plans now to attend your state nurses' association or student nurses' association next Legislative Day, where you can meet and talk with your own legislators about issues impacting the nursing profession, nursing education, the environment, and health care. Nurse Legislative Days provide a forum to educate politicians about nursing's priorities and concerns.

Our participation as nursing students in the legislative process can help yield greater power and influence for our profession. By showing a united front, elected officials can come to view nursing students and nurses as an influential resource when they are developing and debating policies

Each year at our Annual Convention, the hard work of NSNA constituents is brought forward in the form of resolutions to be debated in the House of Delegates. The topics may vary, but the common theme of improving safety and quality in practice, supporting life-long learning in nursing education, and advancing the mission of the NSNA remains strong. NSNA's 56th Annual Convention in Grapevine, TX was no exception. Review the resolutions passed by the 2008 NSNA House of Delegates online at www.nsna.org under *Publications*. The Legislative Committee is working diligently to promote and follow through on these resolutions. Look for upcoming *Legislation/Education Fact Sheets* to stay informed on issues important to NSNA. Is there an issue that you feel strongly about? Step up and consult the NSNA *Guidelines for Planning a Resolution* online at www.nsna.org under *Publications* and start making a difference today!

related to health care and health education. But, they cannot support issues from our perspective if they have not heard from us! There is strength in numbers and by working together we do make a difference. But, making a difference requires that we first step up! ©