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Legislative Advocacy

Nurses Urge Lawmakers on Lobby Day
To Support Safer Staffing, More Efficient Home Health Care
Hundreds Venture to Capitol Hill to Advocate for Issues Crucial to Patient Care

SILVER SPRING, MD – More than 200 registered nurses met with congressional representatives June 12 to advocate for safer nurse staffing, expansion of safe patient handling and mobility programs, and removal of restrictions that prevent certain nurses from certifying patients for a home health benefit and ordering durable medical equipment.

The Capitol Hill visits were organized for the American Nurses Association’s (ANA) annual Lobby Day, which leads into the association’s two-day Membership Assembly, ANA’s governing body.

“If there’s one thing I know for certain, it’s that when nurses talk, Washington listens,” ANA President Karen A. Daley, PhD, RN, FAAN, told RNs from state nurses associations before they fanned out on Capitol Hill. “Whether you are advocating for legislation to advance safe staffing, or working to remove barriers that prevent consumers from benefiting from advanced practice registered nurses’ full scope of practice, be proud that we speak with one strong voice for nursing,”

Six RNs from ANA-New York briefed Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY). As the co-sponsor of The Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act (H.R. 2504/ S. 1332), Schumer said he would be “pushing the home health bill pretty hard” and looking for an opportunity to offer it as an amendment to another health care bill with a good chance to advance. That bill would allow nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse midwives and physician assistants to certify home health services for Medicare patients. Current law requires a physician to sign home care plans, which can cause delays in care and lead to hospital readmissions.

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The ANA-New York contingent emphasized to Schumer that the restriction on advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) ordering durable medical equipment, such as oxygen equipment and blood glucose monitors, without a physician signature should be addressed at the same time. The nurses contended that it would be “nonsensical” to gain the authority to sign home health care plans and certify patients for the benefit, but be prohibited from ordering necessary equipment for those same patients. Schumer agreed he would work to move such a bill as a co-sponsor if nurses could secure a lead sponsor in the Senate.

Seven members of the Oregon Nurses Association urged a staff aide to Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) to support the same issues, noting that in many rural areas of Oregon, there are no physicians and APRNs serve as primary care providers. They also commended Merkley for sponsoring the RN Safe Staffing Act of 2013 (H.R. 1821) and supporting The Nurse and Health Care Worker Protection Act of 2013 (H.R. 2480), which would require health care facilities to implement safe patient handling and mobility programs.

In association with Lobby Day, ANA also honored U.S. Sens. Susan Collins (R-ME) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) for their advocacy and work on behalf of issues important to nurses and the health care system.

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ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation’s 3.1 million registered nurses through its constituent and state nurses associations and its organizational affiliates. ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.