

Headlines from the Hill

Health system reform: Where is nursing? Where are you?

By Rose Gonzalez, MPS, RN

The first 6 months of the Obama administration have been full of activity. The administration has been addressing the failing economy, cabinet confirmations, and budget issues. In light of these challenges, it is gratifying that health system reform is emerging as a top priority for policy makers.

For ANA, work on health system reform began on the campaign trail and has advanced rapidly since the inauguration. ANA has taken multiple opportunities to promote dialogue among stakeholders, such as the president's transition team, the White House Health Care Summit, and members of Congress and their staffs. ANA even secured an invitation for some state nurses' association representatives to speak out and share their concerns during the White House Regional Health System Reform town hall forums.

Opportunities are not without responsibility. ANA had to do a great deal of work to prepare to participate in the discussions. This year, in addition to updating and disseminating ANA's Health System Reform Agenda, ANA participated in the development of a set of health system reform principles and recommendations that represent the beliefs and interests of the broader nursing community. Approximately 18 nursing organizations participated in this collaborative effort, taking about 5 months to reach consensus. The resulting document represents the expertise of each organization, and can now be used to frame model legislative language in various proposals advancing on Capitol Hill. The document, along with a list of task force organizations with contact information, was disseminated to Hill staff to serve as a resource.

The following statements demonstrate the overarching principles of this document:

- There is a continuing shortage of professional registered nurses, who are the single largest group of healthcare professionals in the country and are critical to the delivery of high-quality, life-saving, preventive, and palliative health care across all care settings, geographic areas, socioeconomic factors, and cultures.
- When advanced practice registered nurses are able to provide services to the full scope of their practice, they increase access to cost-effective, comprehensive,

and high-quality care in a patient- and community-centered environment.

- Patient-centered, community-based care coordination models that include a variety of primary and specialty healthcare provider options have been proven to be cost-effective and efficient in improving quality health outcomes.
- Increased research and clinical focus on wellness and health promotion strategies will yield significant improvements in healthcare outcomes nationwide, and produce long-term cost savings that can be reinvested into achieving a healthier population.
- The use of a nationwide interoperable health information technology system that protects the privacy rights of individuals will improve safety and reliability, ensuring cost-effective and coordinated care.

Principles and recommendations alone will not be enough.

Legislators will soon be back in their district offices ready to hear from you, their constituents. Let your voices be heard. If the larger nursing community delivers the same, unified message, nursing's health system reform principles and recommendations will be far more likely to be included in the broader healthcare reform proposal at the federal level.

Although ANA's presence has been noted everywhere—on the campaign trail, at transition team meetings and the White House Health Care Reform Summit, at numerous coalition meetings including the Health Reform Dialogue Group, and in various offices on Capitol Hill—ANA cannot do this alone. We need nurses, the backbone of the healthcare industry, to get involved. ANA asks that you visit www.nursingworld.org to read these documents and prepare yourselves to tell your members of Congress what is needed the next time they are back in their district offices. Don't let others do the talking for us! It is up to you to help us all make a difference and secure meaningful reform. ★

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President Obama addresses the public during a rally in Bristol, Va., about lowering healthcare costs and promoting public health were major issues.

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