

Headlines from the Hill

ANA ensures nurses are at the table on healthcare reform.

By Rachel Conant

ANA has a long history of supporting and fighting for meaningful healthcare reform that assures universal access to high-quality, affordable health care for every person in the United States. ANA believes that health care is a human right, and will continue to fight on behalf of nurses and their patients to ensure that this is achieved. ANA has been proud to represent the nursing profession at healthcare summits and forums, where we have worked with elected officials, the Obama administration, and other stakeholders to provide input and find solutions to the ongoing healthcare crisis plaguing our country.

In January, ANA President Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR, attended the first of a series of “summit conversations” to highlight the emerging national consensus on key components of a reformed 21st-century healthcare system. Sponsored by America’s Agenda: Health Care Education Fund, summit conversations bring together 100 of America’s leaders in business, labor, government, and the healthcare sector and are hosted by University of Miami President Donna E. Shalala and moderated by Emmy-award winning political commentator Bill Press.

ANA was privileged to be invited to the White House summit on healthcare reform on March 5. Patton joined White House staff and healthcare reform stakeholders, including members of Congress, healthcare providers, and leaders of business groups, hospitals, insurance companies, and consumer organizations, to discuss health system reform.

Patton focused on the need for investment in the nursing workforce and the importance of safe staffing and public reporting of staffing plans. Commenting on the day of discussion, Patton added, “Participating in the summit inspired hope that meaningful healthcare reform will occur with this new administration and Congress. I believe that working together, we will achieve quality, affordable health care for all.”

At the closing session, Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA), an RN, also emphasized the need to invest in nursing, prompting President Obama to recognize the need for nurses and nurse educators, and the vital role played by nurses in the healthcare system.

ANA has also been involved in a series of invitation-only, White House-sponsored regional healthcare

forums. ANA members have been invited participants at each meeting that has been held, including forums in Michigan, Vermont, Iowa, North Carolina, and California. On March 23, Ginny Wangerin, RN, Iowa Nurses Association president and a nurse educator at Des Moines Community College, participated in the Des Moines, Iowa, forum. She represented nursing’s critical perspective on creating a healthcare system that is responsive to the needs of consumers and provides equal access to safe, high-quality care for every citizen and resident in a cost-effective manner.

In addition to taking part in these public events, ANA continues to work toward achieving meaningful healthcare reform through its participation in coalitions with the nursing community and wider-ranging stakeholders, and through participation in dialogues with members of Congress and staff on Capitol Hill.

ANA has also been a part of the Health Reform Dialogue (HRD) group, a gathering of leaders from widely diverse national organizations that have pledged their mutual commitment to federal healthcare reform. Using the HRD process, the group brought together stakeholders representing the health industry, providers, consumers, and businesses to build consensus on healthcare reform and to create political momentum among political leaders for passing significant health reform legislation. ANA was the only nursing organization at the table and was instrumental in contributing language to the discussion that will result in gains for nurses and the patients we serve. The HRD group reached accord on several key issues, such as expanding health coverage, focusing on prevention and wellness, and increasing funds for developing the primary care workforce, including education, loan forgiveness programs, and payment reforms, and is now advancing these ideas in the media and before Congress.

ANA will continue to work to ensure that nurses are represented in the healthcare reform debate. We will insist that decision makers recognize that meaningful access to health care for all won’t be possible without a strong nursing workforce and policies that remove barriers to care and incorporate all providers fully in the process.

To stay on top of the latest news on ANA’s involvement in the healthcare reform debate, make sure you sign up for ANA’s legislative newsletter, Capitol Update, at www.capitolupdate.org, and NSTAT, ANA’s legislative alert system, at www.anapoliticalpower.org. ★

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