

# Guide to Meeting with Your Congressional and State Representatives

The following was taken from ANA's fact sheets on Meetings with Members of Congress in their District, Basics of Lobbying and Contacting Members of Congress. They were revised slightly to meet the needs of NACNS members. Mark each box "Complete" as you accomplish each step.

## *Timeline and Steps to ensure an effective meeting:*

### Months to Weeks before the Meeting:

#### Information and Fact gathering

- Check on the federal legislation you wish to discuss.
- Join or follow your professional national or affiliate organization for issues they are following or weighing in on.
- For State legislation, you can find information by going to the State Legislation website.
- Find out as much as you can about the piece of legislation through networking and reviewing information on the intranet.

#### Requesting a meeting with legislators

- Send a letter or e-mail requesting a meeting.
  - **Tips on effective e-mail and letter writing:**
    - Be brief - Short, direct letters are the most effective.
    - Be specific - Deal with just one subject or issue in your letter and state your topic clearly in the first paragraph.
    - Be personal - Letters are most effective when they reflect your personal experiences and views in your own words. Form letters don't carry as much weight as a letter that you have written yourself.
    - Be sure to give your name and address - Legislators and other decision makers pay most attention to letters that come from their constituents-people who will be voting for or against them- so it's important to let them know you are from their district.
    - Be persistent - Write often, especially to legislators who are undecided on an issue. To determine the status of a bill that you will be writing to your Congressperson about, go to your state legislator's website.

- Promptly follow-up your letter or e-mail with a telephone call to the member's office. Ask to speak with the member's scheduler who handles district office appointments or appointments for state representatives.
- Invite colleagues and other supporters to attend the meeting. Hearing the same message, individually and collectively from CNSs and other supporters makes this the best way to make an impact on a member's position on our issues.

## **Weeks to Days before the Meeting:**

### **Strategize for the Meeting**

- Meet in advance of the meeting, the group should meet to strategize.
- Designate a lead person to deliver the key message you want to leave with the member.
- Identify or clarify which issue(s) you want to discuss (no more than three).
- Gather information as it relates to the issues you want to discuss. Learn about your legislators' records on NACNS and other health care issues, the committees they are on, check their website, call their office to see which committee handles state nursing practice.
- Become familiar with the opposition's views and arguments on the issues to help you answer questions, such as the American Medical Association or the state medical society's view. Develop the rationale to refute what they are saying.
- Develop a 30 second "elevator speech" about what the CNS does. Legislators do not want to know the details; they want to know in a sound bite what you do and why it is so important. Prepare a very brief statement of how you are different from other APRNs and why you need to be protected by legislative action that they can bring forward and support.
- Prepare a story of how you made a difference in the life of one or more of your patients. Describe how CNSs influence care outcomes by providing direct patient care for complex patient situations, expert consultation and education for nursing staff, and thorough assessment of complex systems of care and implementing improvements in health care delivery.
- Prepare materials to leave behind with the legislator or staff such as copies of relevant NACNS position papers, and a memo or fact sheet summarizing your main concerns. Materials should be brief and to the point; no more than 2 pages.

- Become familiar with other health care bills that may impact your practice and have been introduced. Identify the bill number and address in a way to educate the legislator. If you know about things that are going to be voted on, give the names and specific committees that are relevant.
- Form a coalition when possible, to underscore the broad appeal of your position. Agree on specific talking points and designate a lead spokesperson for the meeting.
- Seek support for your issues from consumer organizations, such as the local AARP chapter if possible.
- Confirm the appointment the morning of or day before the meeting and arrive on time.
- Dress professionally, the appropriate dress code is a suit or pants/skirt with jacket for women, suit and tie for men.
- Plan for delays: Remember that the Congressperson/state legislator may be late due to many things, including overruns of previously scheduled meetings.

**The Day of the Meeting: Your discussion with the member of Congress/state legislator should be organized and focused on patients and NACNS's principal issue(s).**

### **During the Visit**

- Introduce yourself and start on a positive note. If s/he recently voted in support of an issue of concern to you, thank her/him.
- Clearly state the position of the CNSs in your state, or the coalition you are representing.
- Talk about what the opposition might be saying, such as the AMA, and have the facts to refute this.
- Furnish materials supporting your position. Mention if letters to the editor have been sent or other advocacy steps have been taken.
- Demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the member's constituency. Members of Congress and state legislators want to represent the best interests of their district or state.
- Explain your position with facts, but also use personal stories when possible. Again, make the connection between your request and potential benefits to the constituents. Let the legislator understand the personal ramifications or benefits resulting from their actions.
- Ask the legislator or staff member

- To explain if you don't understand something.
- To clarify what their position is on the issue.
- To take some specific actions such as sponsoring a bill or voting for or against a pending measure.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, but offer to get an answer and ask about a way to follow up.
- Thank the legislator and staff as you leave, provide your business card and offer to help as much as you can. (Don't be surprised if they call.)
- Emphasize how you can be helpful to the legislator and don't assume that s/he knows anything about nursing or CNSs and how they are different from LPNs, RNs, and NPs.
- Ask directly for the member's help in supporting NACNS's position and try to get a clear sense of where the Member/state legislator stands on NACNS's principal issues.

### **After the Meeting**

- Every participant should immediately write an individual thank-you note to the member of Congress and any staff member present during the meeting. Be sure to express your appreciation to any of the member's staff that was involved in scheduling or facilitating the meeting.
- Follow-up with the legislator or staff member re: clarifications, actions to be taken as needed.
- If the legislator has offered to introduce a bill, work with his/her staff in the development of the legislation. See Guide to Developing Legislation for CNS Practice and the Legislative Process.

Provide them with a model (see Oregon and Pennsylvania's legislation for CNS). Ensure that there is precise detail on the requirements for the CNS to be recognized and don't leave the detail to the regulatory agency, such as the Board of Nursing.

- After the bill is crafted, be careful what groups other than NACNS or other APRN groups you share the information with until it is introduced. Those with opposing viewpoints may try to sabotage the legislation and prevent the introduction of the bill for discussion and action.

[http://www.rnaction.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nstat take action activist resources](http://www.rnaction.org/site/PageServer?pagename=nstat%20take%20action%20activist%20resources)