Influencing Legislators to Improve the Health Care System: A QSEN Education Innovation Strategy

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Background
- 2003 Institute of Medicine’s Health Professions Education Report challenges nurse faculty to prepare DNP students who can deliver evidence-based, patient-centered care as members of an interdisciplinary team.
- Central to this report, are the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA) that encompass DNP Essential V, Healthcare Policy for Advocacy in Healthcare.

Purpose
Offer an interactive learning opportunity, framing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for DNP students to engage in political advocacy which encompasses DNP Essential V.

Results: n=25 DNP students

Pre-intervention Survey (n=25):
- 91% believed it is very important for nurses to design, influence, advocate, or implement policy at the local, state, regional, or federal level
- 70% ranked knowledge and skills as the most important facilitators for nurses to influence policymakers
- 70% identified time as the biggest barrier to engaging a legislator
- 48% identified a lack of knowledge and skills
- 51.4% believed that nurses have some influence on legislators regarding nursing and health policy issues
- 45.9% communicated with a legislator in the past two years

Post-intervention survey (n=51):
- 58.8% believed that nurses have some influence on legislators regarding nursing and health policy issues
- 52.9% will definitely engage a legislator in policy issues related to health and nursing post intervention

Methods
- Intervention: A panel comprised of a state representative (Jeff Yarbro, D), a state senator (Cameron Sexton, R), and two nurse leaders (Jill Kinch, MSN, PNP and Mavis Schorn, PhD, CNM) met on campus with DNP students for an hour-long session. The panel members answered moderator and audience questions about best practices to engage and influence policy makers.
- Moderator questions:
  1. Aside from your TN legislative efforts and commitments, what is your full time job? How has this influenced your position as a legislator/advocate?
  2. How did you get involved in health policy?
  3. What is the best way for nurses to engage with legislators?
  4. What are the best ways for nurses to advocate for nursing issues and health policy?
  5. (For the legislators) What is your preferred method of communication? Is it an option to meet with you in-person?
  6. (For the legislators) You receive a lot of emails from constituents. Why do some emails grab your attention more than others?
- Evaluation: A pre- and post-survey assessed

Panelists’ Advice
- Know your legislators and stay in touch.
- Build trust with your legislators.
- Get to the point when talking within 2-3 minutes!
- Translate your experience into a story to explain healthcare.
- Serve as an information resource.
- Advocate on behalf a patient populations to improve health outcomes.

Summary
- DNP graduates design, influence, and advocate for health care policies by acquiring the fundamental KSAs to engage with policy makers.
- This educational innovation is a preliminary step to facilitate DNP students to assume leadership roles in health policy.
- Ongoing teaching strategies that highlight the policy domain will allow DNP students to transform the health care system that meets the needs of its constituents.