

Nurses in Politics

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Politics is often associated with negative images, smoke-filled rooms, with deals made by power brokers, bribes, unethical compromises, pork barreling, bureaucracies, pay-offs, and vote buying, to name only few (Manson et al. 1998). This does not mean that one public policy formation. If nurses want to influence the outcome of policy formation they must be involved in politics.

It is important that the nurse should be part of health care policy. But nurses are lagging behind in the field of politics. They are politically not active. Nurses should participate in politics not as spectators but as a gladiator. It is not enough to wait and see where legislation takes the profession and how changes in public policy will affect patients. If nurses do not become involved and employ a value-laden approach to politics, they have no power over their own future and health care will suffer from their lack of participation (Jardin Karen, 2001).

Politics is a process by which one influences the decision of others and exerts control over the situation and events. So the term politics refers to exercise of influence (Manson et al., 1998).

Florence Nightingale was the consummate political nurse and understood how to influence the British parliament to allocate funds to reform British military hospital and substantially improve the health and sanitary condition of the troops.

Political activism is powerful form of professional involvement. Three levels of political involvement in which nurses can participate are : nurse as citizen, nurse as activist and nurse as politician.

Nurse as Citizen

A nurse citizen brings the perspective of health care to the voting booth, to public forum and to involvement in community activities. Example, budget cut to a school

district might involve elimination of school nurses. At a school board meeting, nurse can effectively speak about the vital role that school nurse provides to the health of children and the cost-effectiveness of maintaining the position.

If the nurses tend to vote for candidates, who advocate for health care, nurse citizens can be politically active by :

- ◆ Registering to vote
- ◆ Voting to every election
- ◆ Keeping informed about health care issues
- ◆ Speaking out when services or working conditions are inadequate.
- ◆ Participation in public forum.



Ways of political influence in different areas

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- ◆ Knowing her local state and federal elected officials.
- ◆ Joining politically active organisations.
- ◆ Participating in community organisations that need health experts.
- ◆ Joining a political party.

Nurse Activist

The nurse activist takes a more active role than the nurse citizen. Nurse activist can make changes by :

- ◆ Joining politically active nursing organisations.
- ◆ Contacting a public official through letters, telegram, email or phone calls.
- ◆ Registering people to vote.
- ◆ Contributing money to a political campaign.
- ◆ Working in a campaign.
- ◆ Lobbying decision makers by providing pertinent statistical and anecdotal information.
- ◆ Forming and joining coalition that supports on issues of concern.
- ◆ Writing letters to the editor of local papers.
- ◆ Inviting legislatures to visit the work place.
- ◆ Holding a media event to publicise an issue.
- ◆ Providing and giving testimony.

Nurse Politician

Once a nurse realises and experiences the empowerment that can come from political activism, she or he may choose to run for office. No longer satisfied to help others get elected, the nurse politician desires to develop

legislation not just influence it. The nurse politician can :

- ◆ Run for an elected office.
- ◆ Seek appointment to regulatory agency.
- ◆ Be appointed to governing board in public or private sector.
- ◆ Use nursing expertise as a front line policy maker who can enhance health care and profession (Chitty Kittrel Kay, 1997).

The most effective way to influence your future in nursing is to be involved in politics. As a nurse, you are in a unique position to see problem from a patient view point, the health care system view point, and personal view point. You must share your opinions and recommendation with your legislators (Jardin Karen, 2001).

So the following fundamental tools are at your disposal to help you affect the process that influences your life and career.

1. Be informed by :

- ☐ Reading newspapers
- ☐ Nursing journals
- ☐ Listening to news broadcast
- ☐ Watching television programmes that address current issues in health care.

2. Participate

- ☐ Join nursing organisation and activist groups and be active in the work place.

3. Vote

- ☐ Vote for those you want,

in elections in your organisation, your community, your state and your country.

4. Communicate

- ☐ Let your representative know your views through letters, meetings.

5. Influence others

- ☐ Share your opinion with friends, colleagues, neighbours and others.

Conclusion

Should nurse be involved in politics? Now that should not be a question. Yeah... nurses should be involved in politics. To become leaders, nurses need to develop their interpersonal and communication skills by networking in work place and community and by keeping abreast of state and federal government issues.

Bibliography

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