

WOUND, OSTOMY AND CONTINENCE NURSES SOCIETY ADVOCACY AND GRASSROOTS TOOLKIT

Influencing Public Policy: Strengthening the Voice of the Wound & Ostomy Nursing Community

The future growth and vitality of wound, ostomy and incontinence nursing is largely dependent on the ability of our professionals to influence key decisions made in our state and nation's capitols. These policy decisions are essential to preserving the future of our practices, hospitals, research facilities, and the patient populations that we serve. To protect our field of medicine, we must develop and deliver effective messages from credible messengers to our elected officials about the quality of our patient care and its importance to the community.

This is the essence of advocacy, which can be implemented on many levels and take many different forms. This toolkit will present a variety of options for incorporating advocacy efforts into your operations, from simply establishing regular communications with your elected officials to the more advanced efforts entailed in developing a grassroots or grassstops program to strengthen your influence in Washington, D.C. or in your state capitol. WOCN has prepared this toolkit as a resource for its members to enhance their own efforts while the Society continues to conduct direct lobbying on Capitol Hill, provide advocacy support and training, as well as coordinate all of the Society's government relations activities.

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Section 1

The Basics: Communicating Directly with Your Legislator

Legislators are greatly influenced by what they know and what they hear - especially from the people they represent. By communicating with a state legislator or a member of Congress, you can have a profound impact on the government policies that most affect your practice and the field of wound & ostomy nursing.

Your elected officials need to hear from you. They hear from constituents and interest groups about many issues from education to transportation to foreign policy. They need to hear from the nursing community as well. Don't assume they know all the facts about the important patient care role wound & ostomy nursing plays in your community. It is incumbent upon you to provide them with the information they will need to fully appreciate the vital role that your practice plays.

Remember that you also should communicate with legislators from around your state, not just the elected representative from the district in which your facility or institution is located. Legislators from neighboring districts need to know that your practice and field of medicine are essential to their constituents.

Suggested Steps:

Send an introductory packet to your Congressional delegation, especially new legislators.

The beginning of a new Congress is an ideal time to introduce (or reintroduce) wound & ostomy nursing.

- If a new member of Congress was just elected from your state, send a congratulatory letter to the legislator.
- Send a letter of congratulations to those who were re-elected.
- Use this mailing as an opportunity to provide key information about your practice, hospital or research facility to legislators from your state.

Provide information, such as WOCN position statements, to educate or update legislators in your state about the important role nursing plays in your community.

Use this first mailing to begin to develop or strengthen your relationship with the office.

- Follow up with a phone call to the legislator's office.
- Remind the staff to call on you as a resource for further information.
- Extend an invitation for a visit to your facility.

Maintain regular contact with a legislator's office.

Keep your legislators informed about your practice and facility.

- Find opportunities to send positive articles and information about wound & ostomy nursing (e.g. press clips, success story, WOCN newsletter) at least a few times a year.

Communicate clearly about relevant legislation — do not assume that they know where you stand.

- Communicate if you are for or against a piece of legislation.
- Thank the legislator for supporting any relevant legislation.

Depending on the urgency of the situation, use one of the following methods of communications:

- **Letter writing** — Use primarily to accompany information packets, articles, etc. as mail arrives very slowly to Capitol Hill offices.
- **Fax** — Faxed letters are very effective as they are likely to be given to the legislative staff immediately.
- **Email** — Email is particularly effective if you communicate directly through a staffs individual email address or if you are mobilizing a large number of people through the legislator's website.
- **Phone calls** — Phone calls are very effective as it gives you an opportunity to talk directly to the staff and reinforce your relationship with the office.

Writing a Letter

Constituent letters are a common way of communicating with a legislator and an effective advocacy tool.

- A personal letter will get more attention than a form letter or pre-printed postcard.
- Make sure you add your name and address. Some offices will not even open a letter if it is not from his/her state.
- Fax the letter to your member's office as mail takes a long time to arrive since the anthrax scare.

Your letter should be simple and direct.

- If possible, limit your letter to one page.
- State the purpose of your letter in the first paragraph, identifying a specific bill number, if applicable.

- Focus on one particular issue and request specific action from the legislator.
- Explain how the issue will affect your local community.

Letters should be addressed as follows:

To a Senator:

The Honorable (Full Name)
 United States Senate
 (Room Number) (Building Name) Senate Office Building
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator (Last Name):

To a Representative:

The Honorable (Full Name)
 House of Representatives
 (Room Number) (Building Name) House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative (Last Name):

Sending an Email

Email is an easy way to communicate with a legislator or staff member.

- If possible, try to secure an email address of a particular staff member (the health Legislative Aide or the District Office Director) and email him/her directly. This is highly effective.
- All legislators have a web page with a link to contact the legislator. While this is a very easy way to communicate, it is less effective unless you are mobilizing a large number of people. Remember, legislators receive thousands of emails a week so one individual email can get lost.

State key information in the subject line

- As it is easy to erase email, you want to communicate key information in the subject line.
- State that you are a constituent and the issue in the subject line (e.g. “Your constituent writing about _____ legislation”).

Keep your message brief and to the point

- Don’t forget your name and address in the text.
- Embed your message in the text. Attachments should be for background information, fact sheets or endorsements.

Finding your legislator's website and email

- You can find your legislator's email address by visiting either the House or Senate websites (www.house.gov or www.senate.gov) and searching for or selecting your legislator's name.

Telephone Calls to an Office

Phone calls are effective in delivering information quickly and directly, especially on days of key votes.

- State your position and ask what position the elected official is taking.
- Be prepared to explain how the issue will affect your practice and the legislator's constituents.

Calling the District Office

- While the District staff may be less influential in terms of legislation compared to the D.C. staff, they are more accessible to constituents.
- Establishing a good relationship with the District Director is a very effective way to influence policy because the District office staff is responsible for constituent services.

Calling the Washington D.C. Office

- When you call the Washington D.C. office, ask to speak with the health legislative aide.
- Remind the aide that you are a constituent and how many people your practice serves in the state.
- Try to develop a dialogue that will allow you to call back in the future. Encourage your congressional staff contact to call you as a resource for information.

Sample Phone Script

Reference the legislator's website for the Washington and District Office phone numbers. You can locate his/her website by going to www.house.gov for House members and www.senate.gov for Senators. You also can call the Capitol operator at (202) 224-3121 and they will direct you to your legislator's office.

Sample Letter to a Legislator on a Key Issue

Constituent letters are an extremely effective advocacy tool. Your letter should be simple and direct. Ideally, it should not be more than one page long since short letters tend to have the greatest impact. It should only address one issue and you want to be very clear about your position and request. Print your letter on personal stationery, if possible.

The Honorable (First Name) (Last Name)
U.S. House of Representatives/Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515 (for House)/20510 (for Senate)

Sent via facsimile: (202) (fax number)

Dear Representative/Senator (Last Name):

Sincerely,

Tips for Writing a Letter to a Legislator

1. Fax Your Letter

- In light of security concerns on Capitol Hill, send your letter by fax rather than through the postal service.

2. Opening Paragraph

- Introduce yourself as a constituent and how you are connected to the hospital.
- Thank the legislator for any past support that is applicable.
- State the purpose for your contacting the legislator. If applicable, reference a specific bill number.

3. State the Facts

- Back up your position with facts.
- Provide information showing the impact of legislation on your facility or on the legislator's district and constituents.

4. Explain Consequences

- Provide information on the impact of opposing your request.
- Explain the impact on your community.

5. Ask for a Response

- Restate your position.

- Ask for a response.

6. **Close the Letter**

- Be sure to provide your contact information.
- if applicable, include a professional or organizational affiliation so the legislator sees that you are connected to the larger community.

Section 2

Increasing Your Voice: Building a Relationship with Your Legislator

Over time, you will have a much greater impact on public policy by developing and sustaining relationships with your elected officials and their staff. As a starting point, it is important for legislators to be aware of your practice and the community that it serves. However, in order for you to affect their decision making, they must come to know you, your hospital and clinics, the people that you serve, and the other community leaders who form the backbone of your support.

Keep in mind that you also want to develop relationships with legislators from around your state, not just your elected representative. Legislators from neighboring districts need to know that wound ostomy nurses are providing essential medical care to their constituents — even if the actual practice is not located in their district.

People respond to people, and it is important to build personal relationships. These can be with legislators or with their key legislative staff. Building a relationship will take time and hard work, but if done well, it has the potential to yield significant results for WOCN and your local health care facility. Ideally, you will be able to involve your stakeholders and build upon their existing relationships with legislators. Here are just a few ideas to get you started.

Suggested Steps:

Get to know the district staff.

Building relationships with the district office can prove to be very useful.

- The district staff is responsible for constituent services. They will, therefore, be interested in meeting with you and learning about you and your practice.
- Begin by asking the District Director to meet with you and other leaders from your practice at the district office.

Use the first meeting to cultivate a relationship.

- At the first meeting, provide the staff with an overview of the practice and the patient population that it serves.
- Invite the District Director to visit your hospital, clinic and/or research facility for a tour to learn first hand how the practice of wound & ostomy nursing impacts your community.
- Once you have developed a personal relationship with the District Director, it will be much easier to call him/her about a key piece of legislation.

Arrange for a visit to your medical or research facility by your legislator.

A first-hand tour of your facility is the most effective way to educate an elected official.

- Invite elected officials to visit your hospital, clinic, or research facility by sending a letter or fax. Ideally, each legislator from your area, including those from neighboring districts, should visit your facility once a year.
- Follow up with a phone call to the office remembering that legislators are back in the district offices during Congressional recess and on most Mondays and Fridays.

Prepare for the visit with clear goals.

- Prepare for the visit by coordinating closely with the legislator's staff, and determining the length of the visit.
- Develop a very clear agenda, identifying exactly who the legislator will be meeting, what departments you will be visiting, the message, press availability, and the purpose for each stop on the tour.
- Use the tour to demonstrate the needs of the hospital, practice or research facility and not just the accomplishments; identify services that could be provided with additional funding.
- Identify your legislative request(s), if any.
- Prepare appropriate take-away materials for your elected official.

Encourage a tour of the entire facility, including clinics.

- Given the breadth and depth of many practices, hospitals, and research facilities today, consider inviting legislators to see one of your clinics or community centers (example – rural, etc.).
- A visit provides an opportunity to develop a personal relationship with the legislator and senior stakeholders of the practice.
- Include opportunities for the legislators to meet with board members or other senior stakeholders. The goal is not just to educate the legislator but to build a relationship between the legislator and your leadership.

Visit your elected officials in Washington, D.C.

Ultimately, you will want to schedule a personal visit to your members of Congress in Washington, D.C. Elected officials will take notice of your visit — taking the time out of your schedule to travel to Washington sends a very clear message to your legislators about the importance you place on public policy matters. Plan your visit carefully by being clear about what you seek to accomplish and whom you want to meet.

- The best days to visit a legislator in Washington are Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday.

Participate in WOCN Government Relations Committee Legislative Days

WOCN organizes a few Washington legislative days during the year for members of the Society's Public Policy Committee. These meetings provide you a ready-made opportunity to come to Washington and work alongside your colleagues from around the country.

Please notify WOCN Government Relations staff if you come to Washington at other times during the year.

WOCN's government relations staff will assist you in preparing for your visits, possibly arranging for a strategy session with senior policy staff while in Washington.

- Make your appointments in advance. Ideally, you should contact the member's scheduler to seek an appointment a few weeks in advance.
- Call or fax a written request for a meeting with the legislator and his/her staff. Remind them if you are a constituent and how many constituents are served by your facility.
- Remember that a meeting with a member's legislative staff can be as important and productive as a meeting with the legislator.
- NOTE: In most cases, if not all, WOCN government relations staff will make all arrangements for your visit and follow-up activities.

Prepare for the meeting.

Be prepared to state your specific request. Develop 2 or 3 well-documented talking points reinforcing your message.

- Use data if applicable to support your points.
- Be prepared to explain how your legislator's constituents benefit from this issue.
- If multiple people will be attending the meeting, determine in advance each person's role.

Do's & Don'ts for the meeting.

- Be on time, be prepared.
- Have material to leave behind reiterating your points.
- Tell your story and connect it back to the district.
- Don't argue and don't threaten.
- Ask your legislator or staff for follow-up opportunities.

Follow up to the meeting.

- Send a thank you for the meeting.
- Include any information the legislator asked for and provide additional information to reiterate your message.
- Continue to cultivate the relationship.
- If the legislator acts positively upon your request, make sure you thank him/her and if possible, publicize his/her support within your local practice, hospital or research facility.
- WOCN also publicizes government relations meetings and activities in the Society's newsletter.

Invite a legislator to one of your meetings.

Inviting an elected official to speak at a special facility, practice or hospital meeting is an opportune way to enhance the relationship. Take advantage of relationships that any of your leadership or board members may have with the legislator in arranging for the visit.

- Prepare for the visit by developing a clear presentation on your practice and/or hospital and the services they provide to the community.
- If possible, incorporate senior leadership into the presentation.

Thank legislators and staff for their interest and support.

Take the time to thank legislators and staff whether it is for a meeting or support of legislation.

- Be certain to express your appreciation to a legislator following a meeting, hospital/practice visit, or any other personal contact.
- Use the thank you as a way to continue building the relationship and as an opportunity to follow-up with additional materials on your facility or on a particular legislative issue.

Sample Meeting Request Letter to a Legislator

Meeting face-to-face with a legislator is an effective way to develop a relationship and to impress upon an elected official the importance that you place on particular issues. Your letter should be simple and direct about your request for a meeting. If you are proposing to meet in Washington or in the legislator's district, be clear as to the specific date and time you will be available to meet.

The Honorable (First Name) (Last Name)
U.S. House of Representatives/senate
Washington, D.C. 20515 (for House)/20510 (for Senate)

Sent via facsimile: (202) (fax number)

Dear Representative/Senator (Last Name)

On behalf of (your facility's name) in (your city), I am writing to request a brief meeting with you on (day and date) anytime between (specific hours of availability). Representatives from our hospital community, including (reference types of stakeholders; e.g., "nurses") will be in Washington that day and would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about the essential role that wound & ostomy nursing and our practice plays in the local community.

As you may know, (your facility's name) is a vital part of our community's health care delivery system. We provide quality, accessible health care to all segments of our community. [Insert information about your facility, including the number of patients you serve, the number of people you employ, and your areas of expertise in medicine.]

Thank you for considering our request for a meeting on (date). We would very much appreciate it if your scheduler would contact me (or name of your government relations director if signed by someone else) at (phone number) to schedule an appointment.

Sincerely,

Tips for Writing a Meeting Request Letter to a Legislator

1. Fax Your Letter

- In the light of concerns on Capitol Hill, particularly since the anthrax scare, send your letter by fax rather than through the postal service.

2. Open the Letter

- State up front the purpose of your letter, which is to request a meeting with the legislator in his/her office.
- Indicate if other people will be joining you and what subject you want to discuss.

- Bold the sentence that specifies the proposed date and times for the meeting so that it stands out.
- Be sure to reference the day of the week and the date (e.g., “Wednesday, March 3, 2005”) and the specific times during which you will be available to meet (e.g., “between 10:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.”).

3. **Provide Facts on Your Practice**

- Provide some background information on your hospital, practice or research facility highlighting its role in the community and the number of constituents served.

4. **Specify Follow-up Steps**

- Request that the legislator’s scheduler call you to schedule the meeting or indicate that you will be following up.
- Provide contact information so the scheduler can follow-up or call with any questions.

5. **Close the Letter**

- The letter could be signed by you, your practice or hospital leadership or the WOCN President.
- Be sure to provide the person’s title.

Do's and Don'ts: Tips for Meeting Your Representatives

Meeting with your elected officials is often the most effective way of educating them on a public policy issue. A face-to-face meeting provides an excellent opportunity to convey and receive information and to develop relationships that will benefit your facility. You can simplify the process by following the tips and guidelines outlined below.

Before the Meeting

- Request the meeting in writing and follow up by phone to confirm the date and time and who will be attending the meeting.
- If other people will be accompanying you to the meeting, decide in advance each person's role. Designate one person as the facilitator.
- Be clear about the purpose of the meeting and what you want to accomplish.
- Do your homework ahead of time; research the legislator's voting record and know whether he/she sits on any key committees that affect your issue. You should visit the member's website and search on-- line for useful background information.
- Prepare materials to bring to the meeting both as "props" during your presentation and as a leave-behind for the legislator.

During the Meeting

- Be sure to arrive on time and dress appropriately (business attire).
- All participants should introduce themselves and indicate their position with their institution and; be sure to specify that you are a constituent.
- Start the meeting by thanking the legislator for meeting with you and, where appropriate, for being supportive of your position on an issue.
- Present your issue in a clear and concise manner.
- Try to incorporate a personal reference or anecdote to make the issue more real to the legislator.
- Request specific action from your legislator (e.g., support for, or opposition to, a specific bill; floor remarks; talking to leadership).
- Do not argue.
- Do not lecture.
- After presenting your position, listen to the legislator or Legislative Aide.

- If you do not know the answer to a question, don't be afraid to say you don't know and that you will follow up after the meeting.
- Thank the legislator or aide for his/her time.
- Give the legislator the leave-behind packet you prepared.

After the Meeting

- Write a thank you letter to the legislator that summarizes your conversation and any commitments that were made.
- Follow-up and provide any additional information that was requested or offered.
- Contact WOCN about the substance of your meeting (if the WOCN government relation's staff is not with you).

Section 3

About Congress: Resources to Help You Navigate the Legislative Process

This section contains background information on the United States Congress and the legislative process. Included are links to a variety of websites that will be useful to you in tracking the status of legislation and planning your advocacy activities in Washington, D.C.

For specific information on WOCN advocacy efforts and federal legislation affecting the field of nursing, visit the WOCN website at: <http://www.wocn.org>

Congressional Calendar

The U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate maintain their own calendars of legislative activity. In order to obtain the most current calendar produced by each legislative body, you will want to visit their respective websites.

www.house.gov

www.senate.gov

Status of Legislation

You can track the status of a piece of legislation through an on-line service offered by the Library of Congress. This website offers you the option of searching by a bill number, if known, or by a word or phrase. You can also monitor committee action and floor votes by visiting:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

Contacting Your Members of Congress

In order to obtain contact information for your Senator or Representative (i.e., phone number, fax number, or email address), you should access their website. The easiest way to get to a member's individual website is through the House or Senate sites.

www.house.gov

www.senate.gov

Congressional Committees

Each House and Senate committee has its own website with more detailed information on committee action and the status of legislation under its jurisdiction. Among the committees you may want to monitor are the following:

House of Representatives

Appropriations
www.house.gov/appropriations
(202) 225-2771
H-218 Capitol Building

Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies
Subcommittee
(202) 225-3508
2358 Rayburn House Office Building

Budget
www.house.gov/budget
(202) 226-7270
309 Cannon House Office Building

Energy and Commerce
<http://energycommerce.house.gov>
(202) 225-2927
2125 Rayburn House Office Building

Health Subcommittee
(202) 225-2927
2125 Rayburn House Office Building

Ways and Means
<http://waysandmeans.house.gov>
(202) 225-3625
1102 Longworth House Office Building

Health Subcommittee
(202) 225-3943
1136 Longworth House Office Building

Senate

Appropriations
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>
(202) 224-7363
S-128 Capitol Building

Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Subcommittee
(202) 224-7216
184 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Budget
<http://budget.senate.gov>
(202) 224-0642
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Finance
<http://finance.senate.gov>
(202) 224-4515
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Health Care Subcommittee
(202) 224-4515
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
<http://labor.senate.gov>
(202) 224-5375
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building

How a Bill Becomes a Law

For a quick review of the federal legislative process, visit the website below. This site will step you through the process beginning with the introduction of legislation by a member of Congress, the role of committees, floor action, and eventually the President's signature.

www.vote-smart.org/resource_govt101_02.php

Glossary of Legislative Terms

The vote-smart website also includes a brief glossary of basic legislative terms. For a more comprehensive listing, visit the following website:

www.thecapitol.net/glossary

Relevant U.S. Government Agencies

In order to fully follow the development of policy in our nation's capital, you may also want to contact or access the websites of several executive offices, including Cabinet departments and federal agencies. These offices play a role in developing legislative proposals, which the administration submits to Congress for consideration. Depending on the issue and the legislation being proposed, you may want to contact officials in these offices to discuss any concerns or recommendations.

The White House
www.whitehouse.gov
(202) 456-1414
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.dhhs.gov
(202) 690-7000
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
www.cms.hhs.gov
(410) 786-3000
4700 Silver Hill Road
Suitland, MD 20746

Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov
(301) 827-2410
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov
(301) 496-4000
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892

Office of Management and Budget
www.omb.gov
(202) 395-3080
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503