

# TAKE THE FIRST STEP

## Get Involved by Attending Nurse Day at the Capitol

By Patricia Freier, MSN, RN-BC, RCIS, CPHQ

THE LONGEST JOURNEY BEGINS WITH A SINGLE STEP.

I was born in South Dakota and earned my Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center and Master of Science in Nursing from Lubbock Christian University, along with three certifications. But the credential that gives me the greatest pride and fulfillment is my elected position on the TNA Board of Directors.

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I had tried to be active in my political party in the past. It was difficult to learn how to start. Although I am a member of American Nurses Association, I don't always have the same views. I really never had success until I learned how to begin in my own hometown. It was the influence of Texas Nurses Association (TNA) that helped me understand how to begin at a grassroots level and focus on what I know best (nursing and other health care issues).

Getting my first nursing resolution passed at the Lubbock County Republican Convention was tremendously empowering. After eight hours of work, and doing my due diligence as a Precinct Delegate, I finally got my chance to introduce my resolution for the third time. After negotiating a friendly amendment and fight-

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ing off a not-so-friendly amendment, "The ayes have it!" turned out to be very powerful words indeed.

I believe I have been able to influence others to join TNA and take that first step. This year Representative Dustin Burrows asked me to serve and represent nurses

on a multi-disciplinary task force in preparation for the next legislative session. I have been invited to speak on advocacy to student groups as well as speak on health care panels for scope-of-practice and access-to-care issues for Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute (TCCRI).



## Attending Nurse Day at the Capitol is the perfect first step to take on the road to becoming an advocate.

Now, I know I can do what I have done before, and I can probably do more next time.

Over the last 15 years or so, I have participated in Nurse Day at the Capitol, served on the TNA Government Affairs Committee (GAC), and met with legislators in Austin and Lubbock. These initial steps lead to my serving on the task force, which led to the TCCRI health care panel where I was able to secure TCCRI as a new partner in supporting the APRN Full Practice initiative. I helped District 18 write a resolution calling for increased nursing engagement in end-of-life legislative issues, a resolve that garnered five additional districts as co-sponsors and was passed unanimously at the TNA House of Delegates. I now chair a statewide task force in the development of a position statement to lay the groundwork for such action.

I love the challenge of inspiring young nurses and nursing students to engage in their advocacy role, such as the five students from U.T. Tyler who were assigned to meet with Representative Coleman's staff person at Nurse Day at the Capitol in 2017. GAC members served as mentors and guides that day during the event. When I first approached the students, they indicated a little nervousness and wanted me to take the lead. They were eager and excited, just inexperienced in this arena. We were somewhat early, so I took time to teach them about the process and prepare them for the discussion. I explained how it was also important to meet with staff, even if the Representative was not present.

At that time we were working on a number of issues including workplace violence, which involved a grant program to support innovative approaches to reducing or eliminating workplace violence. We all sat down and I began the discussion of our talking points, looking at the students and offering to hand off to any one of them.

The students participated fully in the discussion. They took the handoffs with confidence. They had already been exposed to violence even though they were not registered nurses yet. I was very proud of them. It did not matter if they were nervous initially; they resolved any anxiety they may have felt and presented themselves in a professional manner.

I knew that once they did this, they could do it again and maybe push themselves to do even more next time.

These students represented their school with pride. I hope they continue in their advocacy role, and I hope to see many of you there at the 2019 Nurse Day at the Capitol alongside nursing students. Attending Nurse Day at the Capitol is the perfect first step to take on the road to becoming an advocate. This year marks twenty years since the first event, and once again hundreds of nurses across Texas will come together to represent the profession in front of their state legislators. Celebrate the 10th biannual Annual Nurse Day at the Capitol with us and start your journey to improving nursing and health care statewide. ✕