

Chapter 1

Advocacy Is Essential to Supporting and Advancing Rehabilitation Nursing Priority Policies and Programs

During the past 20 years, health and consumer-based organizations have incorporated public policy and advocacy into their missions and principal activities. They have seen the gains that can be attained through such initiatives. For example, the HIV/AIDS activism of the 1980s and the breast cancer movement of the 1990s are well-known, tangible examples of what organizations and communities can achieve if they choose to allocate human and financial resources to affect public policies. Both causes have benefited from increases in research and programmatic funding for efforts to reduce and prevent the incidence, morbidity, and mortality of breast cancer and HIV/AIDS. For rehabilitation nursing and broader rehabilitation health issues to begin to receive the attention, public policy response, and funding they deserve, rehabilitation nurses must engage in proactive and aggressive advocacy efforts to help drive the national agenda toward ARN's concerns.

- Increasingly, much of what rehabilitation nurses do and experience daily while caring for their patients is influenced directly by laws, regulations, and other policies.
- Policymakers and elected officials can positively and negatively influence issues that affect people with disabilities.
- Lawmakers regularly make decisions that have an impact on patients, physicians, nurses, healthcare insurers, hospital administrators, and researchers - these decisions may be made with limited substantive knowledge and understanding of the people and systems they are affecting.
- More and more rehabilitation nurses are taking action and making a difference. Your voice matters, and we need your help.

Members of Congress are most responsive to people from their own states and communities, and they must hear from rehabilitation nurses “back home” about their priorities and concerns. Without hearing directly from rehabilitation nurses about priority problems and recommended solutions, policymakers either will fail to address such concerns or use information and expertise provided to them by others. Some of their sources may not share the views of the rehabilitation nursing community. Policymakers must have your input, so they are aware of the needs in their communities and the ramifications of changes in policy. **A well-informed, articulate, passionate rehabilitation nurse can be a valued resource to elected officials and their staff, can raise issues of importance, and can help craft and implement necessary solutions.**