

# Rachael's Reflections: A Recap on ANA Hill Day and Membership Assembly in D.C.

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On June 27, nearly 500 nurses from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C. for the American Nurses Association (ANA) Hill Day. This event focused on championing four critical federal health policy issues that impact our profession and the quality of care we provide. NMNA Delegate Eric Riebsomer, NMNA Executive Director Deborah Walker, and I personally visited with the Congressional delegation to address the healthcare policies presented. These discussions were crucial in emphasizing the unique needs and challenges faced by our state and ensuring that our voices are heard at the national level.

- 1. Restricting Mandatory Overtime for Nurses:** Nurse Overtime and Patient Safety Act (H.R. 7546/S. 3860): Aimed at restricting the use of mandatory overtime for nurses, this bill also maintains a nurse's ability to work voluntary overtime if desired. This bill includes whistleblower protections for nurses advocating for safe working hours and conditions. In New Mexico, this will help maintain a healthier, more sustainable nursing workforce, improving patient care quality.
- 2. Nurse Faculty Shortage Reduction**

**Act (H.R. 7002, S. 2815):** This act proposes a 5-year pilot program through a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant to increase faculty at schools of nursing, demonstrating that competitive pay for nursing school faculty can reduce the faculty shortage and ease future nursing workforce challenges. For New Mexico, this means more educational opportunities for aspiring nurses and enhancing the quality of nursing education by supplementing faculty salary.

- 3. Improving Care and Access to Nurses (ICAN) Act (S. 2418, H.R. 2713):** The ICAN Act removes outdated Medicare and Medicaid practice barriers placed on Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN's), promoting patient access to healthcare services delivered by their provider of choice. In New Mexico, this would allow APRNs to practice more freely, expanding access to care, especially in underserved and rural areas. We were able to express to the legislators why this is particularly impactful in our state, given the healthcare disparities of our population. A perfect example we shared is under the current law, APRNs cannot independently prescribe diabetic shoes, resulting in delays in care and an increase in amputations for this patient population.
- 4. Protect Timely Access to Quality Nursing Care in Long Term Care (LTC) Facilities:** The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services recently issued an LTC Staffing Final Rule that establishes minimum safe staffing standards and requires an RN to be present 24/7. ANA is urging Congress to ensure that vulnerable residents in LTC facilities have timely access to quality nursing care.

For New Mexico, this ensures our long-term care facilities can meet residents' needs and provide quality care.

Following Hill Day, the ANA Membership Assembly—the governing and official voting body of ANA—kicked off on June 28. Delegates discussed key issues for nurses and the nursing profession, including:

- **Nurses' Mental Health and Licensure:** Addressing the stigma and barriers around nurses seeking support for mental and emotional well-being.
- **Improved Care for Veterans:** Ensuring healthcare providers are prepared to care for military veterans.
- **Ethics:** Proposed changes to the ANA's 2015 Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements.

On June 29, the Assembly took decisive action to support nurses struggling with mental health issues and licensure, and to increase access to quality healthcare for veterans. Assembly representatives voted on transparency in investments and ethical partnerships. Over 400 nurses, observers, and other leaders attended the two-day governance meeting, where eligible representatives also elected national leaders.

Assembly participants agreed on the need to eliminate discriminatory policies against nurses with substance misuse and mental health issues, fostering a culture of support and compassion. The Assembly voted to accelerate changes to mental health reporting requirements and normalize the process for nurses to seek help for workplace-related stresses. In New Mexico, these changes will create a safer and more supportive environment for nurses, reducing burnout and *(continued on page 10)*

maternal child health nurses, and many others. These grants are a testament to the significant impact of her work on the nursing profession.



**Lorenzo Saenz, MSN, RN, CHSE**, a former Army Medic, is now a valued member of the faculty at Western New Mexico University, where he works in the Simulation Lab. His academic journey includes a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a master's degree in nursing. A native of Grant County, Lorenzo finds solace in the vast sky and enjoys spending time with his family, fishing, hunting, and camping.

Lorenzo chose nursing later in life because of its broad scope and numerous opportunities for different types of work, seeing it as a unique way to serve others. He met his wife while serving in the Army in Kansas. Together, they have a son, who is entering his own nursing student jour-

ney this fall. Passionate about teaching, Lorenzo loves seeing the "lightbulb moment" when a student grasps a new concept in a deeper way. He is an educator at heart with the soul of a soldier.

Transparency and integrity are the values that guide Lorenzo's practice. He believes in owning errors and growing from them by figuring out what could have been done better. Integrating reflection into his nursing practice has helped him to strengthen his skills, knowledge, and resilience. Lorenzo's resilience as a nurse grew while working in the Emergency Department as a novice nurse. On his first day of orientation, one of his patients went into cardiac arrest just 10 minutes after his shift started. This challenging experience strengthened his resolve to embrace the "scary monsters" we sometimes cope with in nursing, face them, and learn from them in ways that improve the care we provide going forward.

Instilling a reflective practice is also a primary focus of his work with his stu-

dents. He has faced challenges in obtaining buy-in for simulation-related innovations, leading him to research deeper and implement evidence-informed strategies that integrate improved student kinesthetic ("muscle memory") skills. Lorenzo's data-driven methodology pilot for clinical skill labs has been demonstrating improved outcomes in student skills development, and improvements in student-perceived comfort levels.

Many of his students are first-generation college students and graduates. Lorenzo remains passionate about nursing because he sees how the trajectory of a family can change and improve when a parent becomes a nurse. He is particularly proud that Western New Mexico University has open enrollment with no ACT or SAT tests required. He works to change the intrinsic motivation of students so they can accept accountability, ultimately making them better human beings. ■

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improving overall mental health.

The Assembly also approved a scheduled dues escalation starting in 2025. Additionally, they provided input on the Professional Policy Committee's recommendations for the draft revision of the ANA's 2015 Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements, which will be open for public comment through July 31, 2024.

ANA Enterprise CNO Debbie Hatmaker reported on the progress made on last

year's dialogue forum recommendations. Dr. Hatmaker highlighted the formation of the Racial Reckoning Think Tank, aiming to advance an anti-racist profession.

As New Mexico nurses, our commitment to advocacy is vital. The efforts made on Hill Day and during the Membership Assembly echo across the country, impacting legislation and shaping the future of nursing. Together, we are not only advancing our profession but also ensuring that every patient receives the highest standard of care.

Let this be a call to action for all of us to stay engaged, informed, and passionate about the policies that affect our practice and our patients. Our voices matter, and together, we can make a difference. ■

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