

# Report from the SHCA Annual Conference, Spring 2002 Washington, D.C.

by *Marlene Gallo*

It was a glorious time of the year to be in our nation's capital. Cherry blossoms were in full bloom in spite of the cool temperatures. Two hundred fifty patient advocates attended this year's conference, which was held in April in conjunction with the AHA. We were invited to join the AHA in their installation of new officers, as well as on visits to our legislators on Capitol Hill.

Friday, pre-conference sessions were held and all agreed that these were some of the best sessions offered during the conference. Hopefully, they will be incorporated into next year's general schedule. The sessions themselves were informative, enlightening and sometimes very thought provoking. One session in particular left me hungry for more information and training on a very timely issue, "Cultural Issues in Pain Man-

agement." Jerri Scarzella opened up a whole new way of viewing the diverse populations we work with and their normal reactions to pain. I truly hadn't thought about the particular characteristics in various cultures that influence patients' reactions to pain. This is a topic that should be discussed at every level of patient care by everyone from nurses' aides to physicians.

Networking is my favorite part of any conference. Many of us are the only patient reps in our hospitals and the feeling of professional isolation can be overwhelming. The annual conference gives us an opportunity to see that we are not alone and our problems are very common. Over coffee, in our hotel rooms, in the hallways we talked about the increasing complexity of the issues we handle on a day to day basis. We are all being asked to do more and more tasks that aren't necessarily related to pa-

tient issues. And we discussed the fact that numerous institutions lack the funding for our basic needs, let alone money to send us to conferences and workshops and provide us with educational materials.

This commonality creates bonds very rapidly among the attendees. I left Washington feeling like I'd made some friends for life. Armed with some new perspectives and lots of phone numbers, I returned to my job with my battery recharged.

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