

HPC Corner: Advocating for Advocacy

By: Jacob Ormsby, MD, MBA

Advocacy! This is a word that might scare some, but is truly an honor which we get to have. Advocacy is a way to act as a voice for patients and our colleagues. For it is without advocacy, that good health policy could not be made. It is something that all of us can participate in from the local level all the way to the national level.

My own experience with advocacy started when I was a resident, but has continued to blossom throughout my career. In fact it has even given me the chance to recently have a one on one conversation with one of my state's US senators. In this meeting I was able to express to him how the changes in reimbursement secondary to E/M increase and budget neutrality, could harm radiologists' ability to provide high quality care to patients. It was information that I had learned by being involved with the ASNR Health Policy Committee and listening to great talks from Melissa Chen, Greg Nicola, Jacqueline Bello, and so many more that I felt well equipped to have a meaningful conversation with my senator. I was able to state actual numbers to my senator and able to give him data to take back to his fellow senators including those on the Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions (HELP) Committee. I also made sure to leave the door open and told him that if he ever had any healthcare questions, including specifically radiology, I was always willing to answer his questions. This is because I want to remain a steward for patients and fellow doctors. Further I made the offer for him to come to our radiology department to further see what a radiologist does and how integral they are to the healthcare system. This is because as much as we know we are a fundamental part of the patient care, with us being in the dark, not always doing direct patient care, we can be forgotten.

Advocacy does not just have to be on the national stage in a formal meeting. I recently had the chance to participate in a forum with state legislatures looking at physician retention. It was a brain storming session with doctors of all specialties in all practice environments. This was in a physician's backyard over hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. It made for a relaxing setting with everyone able to get their ideas across with our legislators and listen to one another's concerns. Again it was a way to come together and build relationships with our policy makers to make sure the appropriate policies are made.

My stories are not unique. You can ask anyone on the ASNR HPC and they can tell you their stories of interactions with health policy makers. Being visible as neuroradiologists and forming relationships with legislators are important in order to influence policy that can benefit patients. Advocacy is a privilege to improve the healthcare system for patients. It is therefore why I too am advocating for advocacy.