



Building Relationships with Elected Officials

An effective and sustained relationship with a Member of Congress and staff members in the Congressional office is built upon a foundation of personal communications and face-to-face exchanges. These must occur consistently over time so that the other communications that you will invariably need to use – letters, e-mails, phone calls, -- will have the kind of personal impact and value that can result in real action from the office in support of the issues of importance to you.

Face-to-face meetings

Although initially intimidating and frequently a challenge to arrange, face-to-face meetings with your representative or senator are an important goal for the effective advocate to pursue. Persistence and planning will eventually pay off. And always remember that you are the constituent and that fact alone often carries far greater weight than does the “influence” of professional lobbyists in getting a meeting.

In addition, you can enhance your chances of arranging a meeting by:

- Working with someone you know who has an existing relationship with the Member to assist in getting the appointment.
- Arranging the meeting at a district office near your home rather than trying to meet only in Washington.
- Coordinating or hosting a group meeting with several of the Member's constituents [pharmacists or otherwise] who are in support of your issue.
- When seeking a meeting in Washington, schedule activities sufficiently in advance to make a meeting with the Member more probable.

Of course, arranging a meeting with the Member doesn't always work out. Remember, however, that the Member's staff does the majority of the research and analysis on issues and legislation. Take advantage of that expertise! Ask to meet with the legislative assistant that deals with health issues. That relationship can be an extremely important and beneficial one as well – especially if you can also be a resource to the staff on issues that are critical to their office.

Regardless of with whom you meet, make sure that you:

- Introduce yourself and be clear on your reason for the meeting
- Mention mutual friends/contacts
- Make your key points in concise, clear language
- Respect the time constraints – keep the discussion brief and on point

- Provide a brief written synopsis of issues and key points as a “leave-behind”
- Expect questions and be responsive to them
- Discuss – do not argue – the issues
- Show dedication and passion about the issue
- Whenever possible, get a firm commitment of support
- Follow up with a thank you letter, regardless of the “success” of the meeting

Perhaps most importantly, have your meeting objectives and desired outcomes clearly in mind when you go into the meeting and make sure that they are addressed. Often time is poorly allocated between social banter [too much] and business talk [not enough]. Do your best to balance both of these important parts of the discussion.

General Communication Do’s and Don’ts

Whether communicating in person or by other means, make sure of the following:

Do’s

- Clearly identify the subject of interest, including current House and Senate bill numbers if applicable to the discussion
- Explain your connection to the issue and its impact on you, patients, or others
- Write legibly and concisely
- Try to determine the Member’s position [or likely position] on similar issues
- Use personal experiences in outlining your position and concerns
- Use your own business or personal stationary
- Communicate actively when legislation is under consideration in a committee, conference or on the floor of the House or Senate
- Write more than once on the same issue, especially if the legislation or activity changes (favorably or otherwise) and note what impact those changes will have
- Write to the appropriate committee and subcommittee chairmen responsible for the legislation when you have information that will help the committees’ deliberations (copy your representative and/or senators as appropriate)

Don’ts

- Be rude or threatening
- Promise something you cannot deliver
- Be self-righteous or overbearing
- Pretend to have more influence or power than you truly have
- Be vague about the issue – present facts that can support or refute the Member’s position or responses.
- Forget to thank the Member for past assistance and support
- Bring up past campaign contributions or present a check during a meeting (this should be restricted to specific fundraising events]

What Your Elected Officials Need from You

Any effective relationship is a two-way street. As you build your relationship you can become a significant resource to your Congressional delegation on pharmacy, patient care, and other health-related issues. In return, your elected officials will be looking to you for help in the following areas:

- Timely and correct information on pending or proposed legislation, together with your analysis of the legislation's local or national impact
- Understanding of issues through exposure to constituents
 - Speaking engagements before constituents on health issues
 - Receptions to meet pharmacy and other health care colleagues from the local community
 - Publicity and photo opportunities during visits home
 - Favorable publicity in local or business media on issues that are of interest to health care professionals
 - Appearances on local radio/TV talk shows
- Fundraising and other volunteer activities to assist in election campaigns
- Thank you/support letters when the official has been successful or helpful on key issues of interest to you
- Understanding that compromises that achieve "win-win" outcomes are often the desired goal in political initiatives

Understand the Workings of Congress and its Committees

Much of the work of elected officials at the national level is governed not by their individual activities but by the work of the various committees and subcommittees of the House and Senate on which they serve. The results in members often having major impact on certain types of legislation and relatively little influence on others. Thus it is critical for you to be aware of your officials' committee assignments and their "rank" (i.e., seniority and therefore influence) within committees.

The major committees of the U.S. Congress that deal with health issues are:

- Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
- Senate Committee on Finance
- House Committee on Energy and Commerce
- House Committee on Ways and Means

Each of these committees has a subcommittee that focuses on health care, health professional or similar issues. The Legislative Action Center of the ACCP Web site (www.accp.com) provides easy-to-use and current rosters of these committees and subcommittees as well as information on their agendas, hearings and other matters.

Having your elected officials be members of a key "committee of jurisdiction" is often a plus, since they will be much more focused on key health issues. So it is important that you know whether your elected officials are on these key committees and, if so, use that information and "connection" to help advance your issues.

For further information or assistance in working with your Congressional delegation, feel free to contact:

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