“How can I become politically active in my profession and maintain a high level of activity throughout my career?”

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Political activism is an important responsibility for any health care professional and an essential leadership function. Laws and regulations inherently affect pharmacy practice and patient care, ranging from those governing patient access and coverage at the national level to the intricacies of individual practice acts at the state level. To ensure that these laws and regulations meet the needs of the patients, the health professionals, and the delivery systems they are intended to serve, it is vital that pharmacists be actively engaged in the political process to positively influence the development of health care policy. Regardless of your position on individual issues or where you stand on the left/right or liberal/conservative spectrum, policy-makers rely on—and appreciate—the expertise of health professionals as part of the controversial health policy debate.

ACCP first opened its Washington office in 2000 and, since then, has invested heavily in expanding our political advocacy programs and the work we do on behalf of the profession on Capitol Hill and in states across the country. In addition to our day-to-day lobbying efforts, a core function of our Washington office is aimed at helping clinical pharmacists develop and expand their own political advocacy leadership capabilities. Here are some of the ways you can become more politically active on behalf of your profession and your patients.

Understand ACCP’s Medicare Initiative and Why Quality Patient Care Is More Than Just “Provider Status.”

A wealth of important resources related to our Medicare Initiative are available online. Take the time to familiarize yourself with these documents to guide your communications with Congress and help deliver a consistent message around how comprehensive medication management (CMM) helps “get the medications right” and why Congress should enact legislation to achieve this. In particular, you are encouraged to review the following documents:

Medicare Initiative One-Page Summary. A concise summary of the Medicare Initiative providing talking points on why “getting the medications right” is an essential objective for a modernized, cost-effective, and quality-focused Medicare program.

Medicare Initiative Congressional Issue Brief. A two-page overview of the Medicare Initiative outlining the need for a CMM benefit under Medicare Part B and providing details of our legislative proposal.

Medicare Initiative Data Document. Analysis of aggregated data from 19 distinct medication management service practices showing the value of CMM services and
Medicare Initiative Update. Part B Comprehensive Medication Management Coverage vs. “Provider Status”: Examining the Difference. A thorough examination of why ACCP is seeking to establish a new Medicare Part B benefit for CMM services delivered by qualified clinical pharmacists, rather than “provider status” for pharmacists. The document explains why simply adding pharmacists to the list of eligible Part B providers will not guarantee that Medicare will pay pharmacists for their services. It highlights examples at the state level in California as well as initiatives at the federal level that show the importance of securing a Medicare benefit that covers services, not providers.


Get Involved as a Grassroots Advocate
We believe that our ongoing investment in our Washington office leaves us well placed to move our advocacy agenda forward. But our success ultimately lies in the engagement of ACCP members to help their elected officials understand the importance of “getting the medications right” as part of patient-centered, team-based models of care delivery.

With its more than 16,000 members, as well as their professional colleagues and patients, ACCP has the potential to exert considerable influence on Capitol Hill. But to realize this potential, we need the active participation of all our members as grassroots advocates.

Identifying Political Champions
In seeking to generate support from potential champions to advance our Medicare Initiative in Congress, we need to identify elected officials who share our vision of a more patient-centered, team-based, and quality-focused approach to Medicare who also sit on the congressional committees of jurisdiction over the Medicare program itself.

In the House of Representatives, jurisdiction over Medicare is shared between the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Committee on Ways and Means. In the Senate, the Finance Committee oversees Medicare issues. Members who sit on these committees are best placed to take the lead on behalf of ACCP and work to secure the passage of a measure that includes Medicare coverage of CMM.

All ACCP members should know who their elected officials are and whether those policymakers sit on the key committees of jurisdiction. To determine whether your elected officials sit on a committee of jurisdiction, visit our Legislative Action Center and enter your zip code to view your congressional delegation. Check your work zip codes as well as those of your home address—especially if you practice in multiple sites. Members of Congress will be interested to learn about innovative, cost-saving care delivery going on in their district, even if you are not a constituent residing in that district.

[Click here](http://www.accp.com/govt/medicare.aspx) to view the members of the Senate Finance Committee.
Schedule Meetings with Your Members of Congress or Their Staff
Regularly scheduled “district work periods” (also known as “congressional recesses”) present an ideal opportunity to schedule meetings with your elected officials to discuss your practice, your patients, and the importance of establishing a Medicare CMM benefit. Click here to enter your zip code and obtain contact information for your elected officials.

Send a Letter to Your Lawmakers
We have prepared a letter to Congress describing our Medicare Initiative that you can review and edit. You can send this letter in just a few easy clicks, but for maximum impact, we encourage you to personalize the letter by sharing some additional information about your clinical practice and the patients you care for. Simply click here to visit our Legislative Action Center, and follow the instructions to send your message to your representative and senators.

Invite Your Elected Officials to Visit Your Practice
An overarching priority driving ACCP’s policy vision and strategic plan is the development of a consistent, standardized process of patient care. Without an explicit, reproducible process of care, it is not possible to demonstrate to patients, caregivers, or health professionals the ways in which the clinical pharmacist can reliably contribute to improved medication-related outcomes. Put simply, the fact that clinical pharmacists’ contributions to patient care have often been difficult to define could act as a barrier to achieving recognition and payment for those services.

If questions persist about the process of care delivered by clinical pharmacists, even within the health care community, it is understandable that lawmakers in Congress might struggle to grasp what we are proposing when we call for Medicare Part B coverage of CMM services delivered by qualified clinical pharmacists.

Hosting a visit of your elected officials to your practice is perhaps the single most important thing you can do to help lawmakers understand what team-based, patient-centered clinical practice is all about—and to generate their support for recognition of and payment for clinical pharmacists’ services.

A visit also serves as a means to establish an ongoing constructive dialogue with your congressman or senator, and their staff, on issues important to the delivery of team-based, patient-centered care.

A comprehensive guide to inviting a member of Congress to tour your practice site is available on our Legislative Action Center Web site. If you would like to discuss the process of hosting a lawmaker at your practice site, please contact John McGlew at (202) 621-1820 or jmcglew@accp.com.
All ACCP members are urged to consider inviting their elected officials to learn more about members’ practices through a tour of their practice sites.

**Find and Attend a Town Hall Meeting**

Elected officials regularly host public forums to discuss issues of concern to their constituents. To find out when and where these are held, check your member Web sites, Facebook and Twitter accounts, and local newspapers, or call their offices directly. Some town hall meetings are held online or through conference calls. These town hall meetings provide an excellent forum in which to address the issue of health care delivery reform and the future of the Medicare program. Clinical pharmacy advocates should take advantage of this opportunity to discuss ACCP’s Medicare Initiative.

**Support Your Profession Through the ACCP Political Action Committee (ACCP-PAC)**

There is a widely used analogy of advocacy as a three-legged stool—with the three legs consisting of direct lobbying, grassroots action, and financial support for candidates. Political contributions are an essential component of our grassroots advocacy toolkit, helping to raise our profile on Capitol Hill and show our support for members of Congress who share our vision for clinical pharmacists in an evolving Medicare program.

A well-funded PAC demonstrates the commitment within the profession to a legislative and regulatory framework that supports a truly team-based, patient-centered, quality-oriented approach to health care delivery.

ACCP-PAC depends entirely on the support of ACCP members. Although many PACs represent various segments of the pharmacy profession, ACCP has the only PAC dedicated to advancing the practice of clinical pharmacy.

If each ACCP member contributed just $25, ACCP-PAC would raise more than $400,000. All ACCP members should consider donating at least $25 to ACCP-PAC. [CLICK HERE](#) to support your PAC today!

**Apply for the ACCP/ASHP/VCU Pharmacy Policy Fellow Program**

The Congressional Healthcare Policy Fellow Program is a collaborative effort of ACCP, the School of Pharmacy at the Medical College of Virginia/Virginia Commonwealth University, and the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists.

The program provides a unique health care policy learning experience designed to demonstrate the value of pharmacy-government interaction and facilitate practical contributions to the effective use of scientific and pharmaceutical knowledge in government policy development. Fellows spend 1 month with each of the professional organizations as members of their respective government and professional affairs staff. In November of the fellow year, the Fellow begins working in a legislative environment requiring health care input on the staff of an individual senator or representative or a relevant congressional committee.
The program is an enriching opportunity for the Fellow to develop legislative evaluation and policy development skills, improve research and writing skills, and integrate practical policy experience with theory. The Fellow will be expected to undertake a wide array of responsibilities, including researching and preparing briefs on health care issues; assisting with policy decisions; drafting memoranda; and planning, organizing, and carrying out program and management objectives. The congressional office (personal or committee) placement should ideally be with one of the committees that predominantly deal with health issues, such as the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee; the Senate Finance Committee; the House Ways and Means Committee; or the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Applications for the 2016–2017 Pharmacy Healthcare Policy Fellow Program
Interested candidates should visit the Pharmacy Healthcare Policy Fellow program’s Web site for more information and instruction on submitting an application.

Political Activism Beyond ACCP
ACCP’s Washington office is primarily focused on expanding the College’s own advocacy capabilities and building its profile in Washington. However, we actively encourage members of the profession to seek opportunities to become more politically active beyond those offered by ACCP.

- **Register to vote.** It may seem like an obvious option, yet participation among those eligible to vote in the 2014 congressional midterm elections was just 36.4%. Of course, turnout is generally lower in midterm elections than in presidential election years, but only 57.5% of those eligible cast a ballot in 2012 when President Obama was reelected. Voting is the most basic but perhaps most important advocacy activity you can engage in, so make sure that your registration is up to date and that you cast your vote on Election Day.
- **Volunteer for election campaigns.** Volunteering is an effective (and fun) way to build relationships with elected officials and their staff members. Although many perceive politics as negatively dominated by money, candidates rely heavily on dedicated volunteers to help build support at the community level and get out the vote on Election Day. Research local candidates to learn about where they stand on important health care issues.
- **Concentrate your efforts at the state and local level.** Although authority over many national issues, such as implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or administration of the Medicare program, resides at the federal level, pharmacy practice is largely regulated at the state level. Focusing your advocacy efforts on state and local policy-makers and building relationships with these elected officials can provide important opportunities to influence policy outcomes that directly affect your practice and the patients you care for. According to the old adage, “all
politics is local." As health professionals and constituents, you are significantly more influential at the local level than is a national, professional organization like ACCP.

Summary
Although the work of a clinical pharmacist focuses primarily on the patient, health professionals also have a responsibility as public policy advocates to ensure a legal and regulatory environment that enables the optimal delivery of care. Policy-makers rely on the expertise of health professionals to ensure the development of policies that support high-quality, team-based, patient-focused care. ACCP is fully committed to developing political advocacy within the profession and advancing its policy agenda. Clinical pharmacists should not question whether they should include advocacy as part of their professional career, but instead, consider the extent to which they can commit to advocacy work. Many different opportunities exist within ACCP that allow members to become more politically engaged, and we endeavor to help our members become leaders in the advocacy arena.

Contact Us! For more information on any of ACCP’s advocacy efforts, please contact me.

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