A Great Time to Reach Out to Your Elected Officials

Members of Congress have headed home for August recess and are ready to hear what's on the minds of their constituents this summer. They are likely to hear from voters about a wide range of important issues as they tour the communities they represent.

All 435 U.S. Representatives and one-third of U.S. Senators are up for re-election in November. With so many Members of Congress looking to connect with constituents, August is an ideal time to engage in grassroots advocacy in your community and let your elected representatives know the issues important to you and your patients.

PNPs have long been known to have great communication skills. It is important to use those personal skills to get to know your federal legislators and educate them about the issues important to PNPs. Suggestions for issues to talk to legislators about can be found on the NAPNAP website, in the Advocacy Tab, which includes: the importance of reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) set to expire in March 2009; the inclusion of nurse practitioners as leaders of medical home demonstrations; support for federal funding for nurse workforce education and training grants in Title VIII; and other issue talking points.

We also refer you to NAPNAP's new Advocacy Primer (www.napnap.org in the member's only section).

District Office Meetings

All Members of Congress have one or more offices in their districts/state. Meeting with legislators in their district offices is a great way to build relationships with Members and their staff. The August recess offers Members a greater ability to connect with constituents without the distraction of hearings and floor votes. District office meetings allow PNPs to speak about issues that affect you and others in the community. Be sure to call ahead to schedule an appointment once you have identified an issue that you would like to discuss. Feel free to use NAPNAP talking points and handouts available on the NAPNAP website for your meeting. Please keep in mind, you are representing yourself/your practice/your patients and their families, not NAPNAP.

Clinical Site Meetings

Over the years, legislative visits have revealed a number of misconceptions about nurse practitioners. Many legislators and their aides do not realize that most NPs practice independently. Others have trouble differentiating between the education and clinical preparation of RNs and NPs. Some associate NPs with physician assistants.

A clinical site visit offers legislators insight to the role of a PNP and how important they are in the provision of high-quality, cost-effective care. If it can be worked out with

patients ahead of time, it can also be a good way for legislators to understand the basic needs of patients in their community.

When planning a visit with a Member of Congress, you should define specifically what you want to convey to your elected representative, be flexible on possible dates and times, and follow up with the Member's scheduler to ensure that all parties are on the same page. Scripting the visit from start to finish, identify consenting patients for participation, and providing patients and staff with background information on the Member of Congress and the issues will help the visit go smoothly. Drafting an able staff member for camera duty, and submitting photos and an article to local media outlets offer the legislator an opportunity to foster positive news coverage.

During the visit, PNPs should remember to use layman's terms in describing clinical issues, be mindful of the clock, and provide informational resources that lawmakers and staff can take away from the visit. Following up afterward with the member's office with a thank-you note and photographs is critical. If you email pictures and accompanying text to healthpolicy@napnap.org at the national NAPNAP office, we will be happy to post a report and photos of the visit on the NAPNAP website.

Town Hall Meetings

Many Members of Congress hold town hall meetings during August recess. Town hall meetings are district gatherings that allow the Member to brief constituents and allow advocates to raise issues in a public setting. Town hall meetings offer well-organized groups to make an impression, and get an issue some visibility. When participating in town hall meetings, it is important to ask a specific question about specific issue that will get the Member on the record in support or in opposition of an issue. An example of a relevant and timely question includes:

> *Hello, my name is Ann Smith and I am a pediatric nurse practitioner in Jonesville. I understand that in July, Congress passed H.R. 6331, a large Medicare package that included changes to the Medicare medical home demonstration project.*
>
> *Currently the demonstration only allows physicians to lead medical home demonstrations, but nurse practitioners practice autonomously in most parts of this country and provide quality primary care to their patients.*
>
> *I wanted to know whether you support the inclusion of nurse practitioners as leaders of medical home demonstrations?*

Asking questions at town hall meetings provides local attention for your issue, especially if media outlets are covering the event. Asking a question also alerts the Member and his/her staff that this is an issue that they have to focus on. It is also a good opportunity to suggest a follow-up conversation about in the district office.

To learn more about town hall meeting dates and locations, contact your congressional office or look for information in local newspapers.

Letters to the Editor

In addition to hosting and attending advocacy events, there are plenty of other ways to build support for advanced practice issues in Congress and among the general public.

NAPNAP members can author letters to the editors of local newspapers to raise awareness of the issues important to PNPs.

Although letters to the editor are great ways to draw attention to issues, they also can be used to thank members of Congress for their support in a public venue. Elected officials are asked for many things but rarely are publicly thanked. Showing your appreciation will go a long way in developing relationships and fostering their continued support.