


*The College's Division
of Advocacy
and Health Policy:*



An overview

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Division of Advocacy
and Health Policy





Physicians face many challenges in advocating for their interests among state and federal policymakers. The profession's division into dozens of specialties and subspecialties, each with their own representative organizations, complicates efforts to present a united front on the many socioeconomic issues confronting surgeons and other physicians today. The dominance of solo and small group practices among all specialties, and legal limits on the ability to act collectively on issues that affect income and patient access, also stand in stark contrast with the high profile and coordination that other health care system stakeholders—like hospitals, manufacturers, and health plans—are able to maintain before policymakers. Even the typical surgeon's workday, which is scheduled months in advance, inhibits the scheduling flexibility that is sometimes required to participate in a "volunteer army" for advocacy efforts, again in stark contrast with the chief executive officers of health care organizations.

Surgeons are fortunate, however, in that the American College of Surgeons is willing to assume an umbrella role and go to great lengths to provide resources to other specialty societies that it views as constituent organizations. Furthermore, there is camaraderie among surgical specialties that allows for cohesion that eludes the medical specialties. The challenges facing surgery today are significant, but the profession's influence is steadily growing.

Leadership and staff of the American College of Surgeons understand that Fellows want to improve their awareness of the many activities and programs that the College conducts on their behalf. Some of the programs that are perhaps lesser known but no doubt are of increasing

importance to surgeons and their practices fall under the purview of the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy. The following overview of the division and its activities is intended to help improve the Fellows' familiarity with the College and its socioeconomic programs.

Division organization

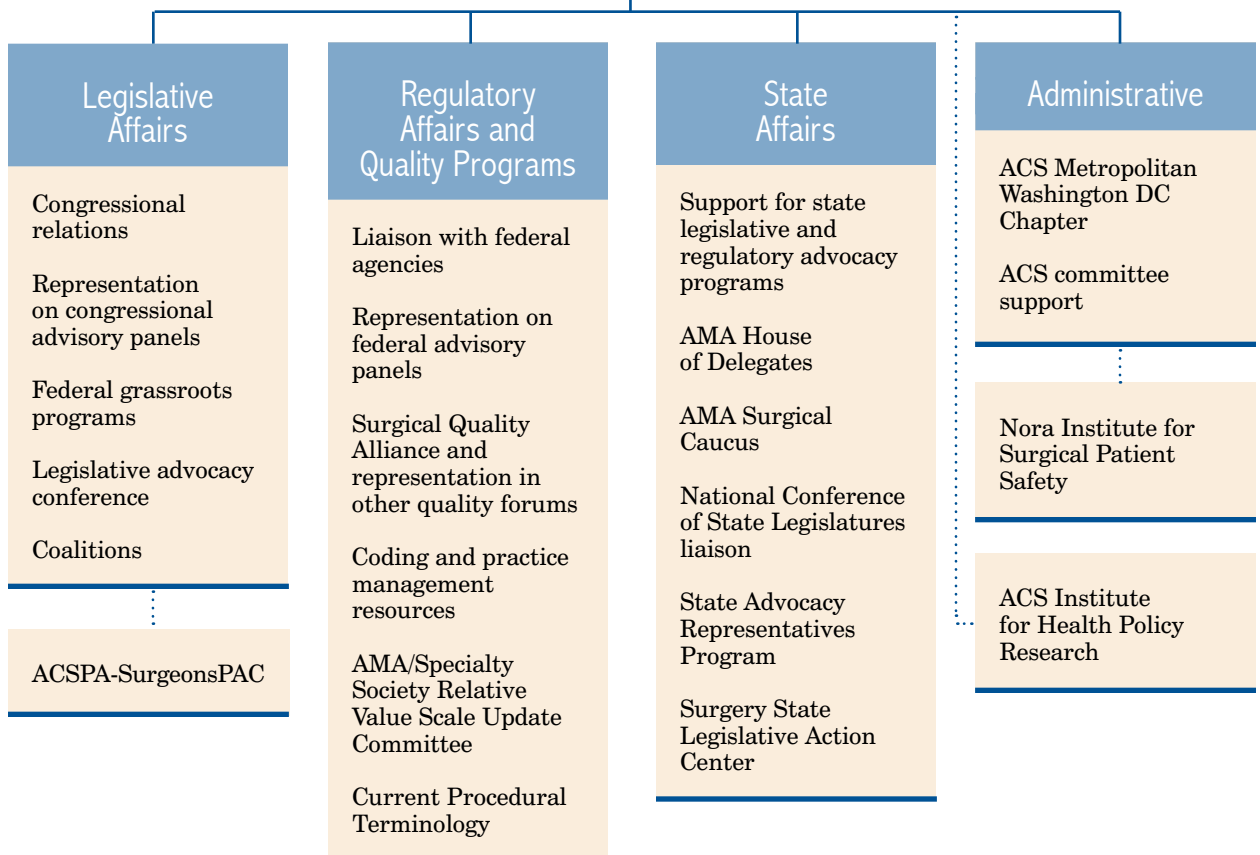
From a structural perspective, the division's programs are divided among four major areas (see organizational chart on page 10).

Federal Legislative Affairs

The College's congressional lobbying staff is headed by Christian Shalgian, Assistant Director for Legislative Affairs. Three lobbyists divide responsibility with Mr. Shalgian for maintaining relationships with assigned offices in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Each staff member is responsible for communicating surgery's perspective to his or her assigned legislators on all current issues. Major issues on the College's federal legislative agenda for 2008 include Medicare physician payment, surgical workforce issues, access to emergency surgical care, children's health, and quality-related issues such as pay for performance and implementation of health information technology.

Legislative Affairs staff work closely with employees of the American College of Surgeons Professional Association Political Action Committee (ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC). ACSPA staff includes Political Affairs Manager Sara Morse, who will soon be joined by a PAC assistant, which is a newly created position. These staff members, along with the federal legislative affairs staff members who allocate a portion of their time

Major program areas of the ACS Division of Advocacy and Health Policy



to the ACSPA, work together to establish and maintain direct relationships with members of Congress. U.S. members of the ACSPA can access further information about the PAC on the Web at http://www.facs.org/acspa_pac/index.html.

Federal Regulatory Affairs

Elizabeth Hoy, MHA, Assistant Director for Regulatory Affairs and Quality Programs, has four staff members who work with her to accomplish the following: (1) monitor, analyze, and respond to federal regulations; (2) provide support to College representatives on the American Medical Association (AMA)/Specialty Society Resource-Based Relative Value Scale Update Committee and in the AMA's Current

Procedural Terminology process; (3) support College efforts related to quality measurement and improvement alliances; and (4) develop practice-management resource material and educational programs. Major issues on the College's regulatory agenda for 2008 include refinements to Medicare fee schedule payments and policies, potential regulation of image-guided procedures, patient safety organization rules, and quality measurement and pay for performance.

State Affairs

Jon Sutton, Manager of State Affairs, works in the College's headquarters in Chicago with the assistance of a State Affairs Associate to monitor legislative and regulatory activities in each state

and assist chapters and Fellows in local advocacy efforts. State Affairs staff members also participate in a standing coalition of Chicago-area State Affairs staff for various medical and surgical specialty societies and organize volunteer Fellows into a State Advocacy Representatives (StARs) group—both of which serve as a resource to share information and strategies on common issues of concern across state lines.

Issues on the College's state advocacy agenda include medical liability reform, trauma system development, repeal of uniform policy provision laws related to insurance coverage for injuries and illnesses resulting from intoxication, uniform emergency volunteer health practitioner protections, patient safety, and taxes on surgery.

The College's participation in the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) and other AMA organizations like the Scope of Practice Partnership are also conducted through State Affairs. (See box, this page, for a list of College representatives in the AMA HOD.)

Administrative functions

The Division of Advocacy and Health Policy provides staff support to the following committees: Health Policy Steering Committee, General Surgery Coding and Reimbursement Commit-

tee, Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Committee, and ACSPA-SurgeonsPAC Board of Directors. In addition, the Washington Office provides all administrative support to the very active Metropolitan Washington DC Chapter of the ACS.

Program area highlights

When considering the College's advocacy programs, activities that likely come to mind most readily include communicating with legislators and staff, securing opportunities to testify at hearings, preparing official responses to proposed regulations, participating in official expert issue panels, and so forth. However, a broad range of other activities fall within the scope of the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy, including the following.

Practice management tools and programs

Originating from a need to help surgeons comply with billing and regulatory rules and procedures, the College has developed a variety of practice management and coding resources. In addition to regional workshops offered on basic and advanced procedure and diagnosis coding, the division sponsors a free coding hotline that is available to all surgical specialties. We also have a collaborative relationship with Physician Reimbursement Systems Inc., which staffs the hotline, through which discounted subscriptions to a robust online coding tool, ACS CodingToday, are available to all Fellows. ACS CodingToday provides users with procedure-specific information on service bundles, modifier usage, Medicare payment amounts, local carrier coverage rules, and other matters.

With respect to practice management, the College has partnered with Economedix to conduct a broad range of inexpensive webcasts on topics ranging from complying with rules of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to negotiating better contracts. These teleconferences, which run between 60 and 90 minutes, are held on Wednesdays near the lunch hour to facilitate participation by office staff, and then they are repeated shortly afterward so surgeons can hear the information that was

ACS Representatives to the AMA House of Delegates

Richard Reiling, MD, FACS (general surgery),
delegation chair
John Armstrong, MD, FACS (general surgery),
delegate
Charles Logan, MD, FACS (urology), delegate
Amilu Stewart, MD, FACS (general surgery),
delegate
Chad Rubin, MD, FACS (general surgery),
delegate
Hannah Zimmerman, MD, Resident/Fellow Section
Sanjay Parikh, MD, FACS (otolaryngology),
Young Physicians Section
Patricia Turner, MD, FACS (general surgery),
Liaison with Young Physicians Section and
YPS Alternate Delegate to AMA HOD

presented. Economedix principals also provide hands-on practice management consultations each year at Clinical Congress through scheduled appointments at the division's desk at the Members Resource Center in the exhibit hall.

In addition, College staff work with Fellow volunteers to develop resource material and practical tools to help surgeons and their staff manage their practices. For example, the following ACS-developed material is available on the Web site:

- *CPT and ICD-9 Coding for Surgical Residents and New Surgeons in Practice* provides comprehensive and easily understood information on coding rules and procedures.
- *Physicians As Assistants at Surgery*, developed in collaboration with the surgical specialty societies, is frequently used by surgeons to appeal claims denials for assistants at surgery services.
- Physicians Quality Reporting Initiative materials include flow sheets for surgical procedure families, a spreadsheet that allows simple cross-reference for procedure codes and applicable quality measures, and basic instructional information.

For a brief summary of practice management tools and programs, see the box on this page.

Surgical Quality Alliance

The College organized the Surgical Quality Alliance (SQA) in late 2005 in response to expanding efforts by private and public sector payors to develop quality measurement, improvement, reporting, and payment incentive programs. (For a list of organizational members of the SQA, see box on page 13). Realizing that the surgical specialties lagged far behind primary care and some medical specialties in the development of performance measures and programs that payors were designing, the College established this forum for the surgical societies to share resources and information, reach consensus, and coordinate responses on behalf of the profession. Among its achievements, the SQA has collaborated on the development of perioperative care process measures and initiated the development of a consumer satisfaction survey for surgical patients.

In addition to the SQA, division staff provides support for Fellows serving on a broad and grow-

ing number of regulatory and quasi-regulatory organizations that feed into the quality measurement and reporting movement, all of which have multiple workgroups that meet regularly to consider issues of importance to surgery. Some of the key groups are briefly described in the box on page 14.

Coalition building

Recognizing that there is strength in numbers, the division devotes considerable resources toward leading and participating in

Practice management tools and programs

Coding workshops

Information on regional introductory and advanced Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) and International Classification of Diseases, Version 9 (ICD-9), coding courses for Fellows and staff is available at <http://www.facs.org/ahp/workshops/regform.pdf>

CPT and ICD-9 Coding for Surgical Residents and New Surgeons in Practice

Information regarding this coding primer developed by John T. Preskitt, MD, FACS, is available at <http://www.facs.org/ahp/codingmanual.pdf>

ACS CodingToday

This online, comprehensive coding resource, for which a subscription is required, can be accessed at <http://www.acscodingtoday.com>

ACS Coding Hotline

This hotline, offered as a member benefit, can be reached by calling 800/ACS-7911 (227-7911)

Practice Management Teleconference Series

These 60- to 90-minute webcasts on practice management topics, which are offered throughout the year, are available at <http://www.facs.org/ahp/workshops/teleconferences.html>

PQRI resources

This ACS-developed resource material for surgical practices participating in Medicare's Physician Quality Reporting Initiative can be found at <http://www.facs.org/ahp/pqri>

standing and ad hoc issue coalitions. Some of the issue-specific groups that involve the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy include the AMA Medicare payment workgroup, Coalition for Patient-Centered Imaging, Stop Medical Taxes Coalition, One Voice Against Cancer Coalition, Health Coalition on Liability and Access, ASC Coalition, Emergency Medical Services for Children Coalition, National Coalition on Health Care, and Physicians Advocating for Patients. Division staff members manage the surgical caucuses of the AMA HOD and its Young Physicians Section and organize annual meetings with leaders of the surgical specialty societies on behalf of Thomas R. Russell, MD, FACS, the College's Executive Director. In addition, the division hosts frequent meetings of the legislative and regulatory staff of the surgical specialty societies to coordinate and collaborate on advocacy agendas; the groups often work together on sponsoring issue adver-

tisements and other educational efforts aimed at policymakers and the public.

Communications

Effective advocacy requires robust communications, and the division is always looking for better ways to communicate with policymakers and with the Fellowship. The division publishes articles and other news items regularly in College communications vehicles like the weekly e-mail newsletter *ACS NewsScope*; the *Bulletin*; and *Surgery News*, the monthly newspaper. In recent months, we have made greater use of Web-based teleconferencing, or "webinars," to conduct briefings on specific federal programs such as Medicare's Physicians Quality Reporting Initiative and to regularly update College leaders on federal issues of concern to surgery. Specific division communications vehicles of note include the following.

- *Advocacy in Action* is a new monthly newsletter, sent to Fellows via e-mail, that provides information on advocacy activities conducted by the division and the ACSPA.
- *Bulletin* columns written by division staff members and published monthly include "Deadline: Washington," "Socioeconomic tips," "In compliance," and "What surgeons should know about..." In addition, feature or news articles composed by staff are frequently published.
- *ACS Cross Country* is a Web-based newsletter highlighting state legislative and regulatory issues and trends.
- The Surgery State Legislative Action Center is a Web-based tool jointly sponsored by close to one-dozen surgical specialty societies, and coordinated by the College, allowing surgeons to join forces to affect state legislation throughout the country. It also includes a media guide that provides helpful contact information for newspapers, television and radio stations, and other news agencies in all 50 states.
- The Federal Legislative Action Center allows Fellows to contact their U.S. senators and representatives in response to legislative alerts that are sent by e-mail, as the need arises.

The Federal Legislative Advocacy Center is available at <http://www.capitolconnect.com/acspa/>. The State Legislative Advocacy Center

Organization members of the Surgical Quality Alliance

American Academy of Ophthalmology
American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head
and Neck Surgery
American Association of Neurological Surgeons
American College of Obstetricians and
Gynecologists
American Association of Orthopaedic Surgeons
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American College of Surgeons
American Society of Anesthesiologists
American Society of Breast Surgeons
American Society of Cataract and Refractive
Surgery
American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons
American Society of General Surgeons
American Society of Plastic Surgeons
American Urological Association
Congress of Neurological Surgeons
Society for Vascular Surgery
Society of American Gastrointestinal Endoscopic
Surgeons
Society of Gynecologic Oncologists
Society of Surgical Oncology
The Society of Thoracic Surgeons

can be accessed at <http://www.facs.org/sslac/index.html>.

Future programs and activities

College leaders and division staff make a conscientious effort to continuously adjust staffing priorities, update old programs, and adopt new strategies as needs become apparent. Some of the notable changes currently under way include the following.

- *Joint Surgical Advocacy Conference.* On March 9–11, the College cosponsored a Joint Surgical Advocacy Conference with a number of the surgical specialty societies, featuring presentations by key policy leaders in Washington and personal visits for conference participants with their legislators or staff. Plans are under way to make this an annual event, in order to amplify surgery's presence as a cohesive advocacy force on Capitol Hill.

Key groups that focus on quality issues

AMA Physicians Consortium for Performance Improvement

Group's process/outcomes measures focus on physician accountability

National Committee for Quality Assurance

First group to focus on quality measures for health plans

National Quality Forum

Group promotes a multistakeholder process for endorsing measures

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Governmental agency required by law to consider measures developed by all these groups when implementing its own programs

AQA (formerly known as Ambulatory Care Quality Alliance)

Multistakeholder group that addresses measure implementation issues

Quality Alliance Steering Committee

Joint effort between the AQA and the Hospital Quality Alliance

- *Advocacy Hotline.* Following a successful grassroots telephone campaign last fall on the Medicare physician payment issue, the Board of Regents recently approved establishing a toll-free advocacy hotline that Fellows can use to contact their members of Congress.

- *ACS Institute for Health Policy Research.* Headed by George F. Sheldon, MD, FACS, and housed at the Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research in Chapel Hill, NC, the new institute will begin collecting data on the surgical workforce and other issues that can be used to augment the College's policy development and advocacy activities. Its reporting relationship is outside the purview of the division, but there are strong collaborative ties and coordination of activities and information.

- *Nora Institute for Surgical Patient Safety.* This new patient safety initiative is tentatively scheduled to open in June. The Nora Institute will be a premier resource for surgical patient safety information, helping to inform patients and surgeons about the practice and principles of surgical patient safety. The institute's work will encompass activities that cut across many College divisions, although Advocacy and Health Policy staff will provide general program support.

- *20 F Street.* Scheduled for completion in 2010, the College's Washington Office will be housed in a new building that is being constructed on F Street on Capitol Hill. This state-of-the-art facility will feature first floor conference facilities and a rooftop terrace for hosting policy briefings and receptions. It will also serve as the Washington home for a number of the surgical specialty societies. (See "From my perspective" on page 4 for further details.)

For more information

For more information about the programs and activities of the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy, visit the College's Web site at <http://www.facs.org/ahp/index.html>. 