

For the past few years, the American College of Surgeons has been expanding its advocacy efforts to include greater involvement in state legislative and regulatory issues. Fellows and chapters have indicated in membership surveys and during visits from College leadership and staff that they would like the College to be more supportive of their efforts to advocate in their state legislatures. In fact, a 2001 survey of the chapters indicated strong support for the College's development of advocacy resources for use by chapters, such as sample letters to legislators, fact sheets, issue briefs, and so on.

This article highlights some of the advocacy resources the College has created so far to assist Fellows and chapters in their federal and state advocacy efforts. Most are available for easy access on the College Web site, primarily the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy's home page (<http://www.facs.org/dept/hpa/index.html>). Because this is an ongoing and dynamic process, it is important that surgeons regularly visit this site to check on updates to issues, publications, resource materials, and so on. Web addresses for the other resources mentioned in this article are listed in the box on page 19.



ACS offers advocacy resources

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Advocacy resources

Grassroots advocacy sometimes seems to be a confusing and frustrating effort. A lack of information about an issue, unfamiliarity with the “how-tos” of legislative advocacy, uncertainty about the effects of advocacy activities, and the idea of squeezing one more activity into an already busy schedule can make grassroots lobbying an intimidating proposition. However, the following Internet resources should help.

- *Staff:* The College has committed considerable staff resources to its Division of Advocacy and Health Policy. This Division is involved in numerous socioeconomic issues and activities. Its Web page contains links to information for College-sponsored CPT coding workshops, practice management courses, and the CPT coding hotline, as well as a complete list of Division staff, including contact information and areas of responsibility. Calling a staff person in the Division is a good first step toward learning more about an issue, getting advice on which legislators or government officials to contact, and so on. The Washington Office, which handles all federal activity, can be contacted at 202/337-2701. Questions about state legislative or regulatory issues should be directed to Christopher Gallagher, Manager, State Affairs, in the College’s Washington Office, or Jon Sutton, State Affairs Associate, in the College’s Chicago Office at 312/202-5358.

- *Legislative Action Center (LAC):* This simple, user-friendly Web-based advocacy tool is an excellent way for surgeons to advocate on their behalf. The LAC requires entry of a zip code, which helps identify federal legislators. It contains action alerts on such issues as Medicare payment, trauma funding, and federal tort reform, and provides sample letters to legislators that can be sent by e-mail directly from the action center. These letters are easy to modify to reflect a surgeon’s personal situation and the effect proposed legislation could have on his or her patients. Also, the LAC conveniently links a surgeon to his local media outlets (newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations), so that surgeons can get the message out to the public and to patients, who can serve as effective advocates on any issue.

While the Legislative Action Center currently is structured to address federal issues only, the College anticipates that a state legislative component

will be added by the end of this year. When this new service becomes available, chapters will be able to direct their members to action alerts for issues popping up in their state legislatures.

- *State issues database:* This database provides surgeons and chapters with important information on proposed state legislation and regulation, including bill number and subject, legislative provisions, and bill status. The database is searchable by state, issue, legislative text, or date. Because new bills are added on a regular basis, and

Web addresses

Division of Advocacy and Health Policy
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/index.html

ACS Advocacy and Health Policy staff
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/staff.html

Legislative Action Center
<http://capwiz.com/facs/home/>

State issues database
<http://web.facs.org/statelegislative/default.htm>

Tips for communicating with legislators
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/tips.html

State legislature Web sites
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/statesites.html

Publications on socioeconomic issues
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/pubs/pubs/html

ACS views on particular issues
<http://www.facs.org/dept/hpa/views/views.html>

Other resources
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/otherres.html

Scope of practice action kit
www.facs.org/dept/hpa/scopeofpractice.html

Professional liability action kit
<http://www.facs.org/dept/hpa/proliability.html>

others are periodically updated, surgeons are encouraged to regularly visit this database.

- *Communicating with legislators:* Critical to grassroots advocacy is effective communication with legislators and other government officials. Whether communication is conducted in written or oral form, it is important to understand and follow a few simple “do’s and don’ts” for writing letters, talking with a legislator, or setting up a meeting. These tips are easily printed for sharing with colleagues, who should be encouraged to contact their legislators when an action alert is sent out.

- *State legislature Web sites:* Each state legislature has a Web site that contains volumes of information relating to bill status/history and text, pages for state senators and representatives, and lists of legislative committees and their hearing schedules. They can also serve as tools for identifying an individual’s elected officials, reviewing voting information, and so on. Fellows should visit their state’s Web site and become familiar with the various features and information available.

- *Publications on socioeconomic issues:* It is important to know in advance of communicating with policymakers exactly what to say about an issue. To help surgeons understand socioeconomic issues, for many years, the College has published articles, health policy briefs, and newsletters highlighting state and federal issues. By visiting the link listed on page 19, surgeons can find these items in one convenient place. In addition, ACS views on particular issues are available.

- *Other Internet resources:* Searching the Internet for anything may be a frustrating and time-consuming experience, with thousands of hits on any one topic. To help narrow the focus, the College’s Web site identifies some useful legislative Internet sites, as well as links to the legislative/governmental relations pages of the national surgical specialty societies. All these items are found at the Web site listed above.

Chapter-focused resources

One issue that came to the College’s attention earlier this year was that of single-degree oral surgeons working to revise the definition of the practice of dentistry to expand their scope-of-practice into cosmetic surgery of the head and neck. To assist chapters in responding to these efforts (and

to provide them with a warning that this situation could happen in their states), the College developed and distributed a scope of practice action kit. It provided a briefing on the issue and suggestions for advocacy activities, such as contacting state dental boards to be placed on their meeting mailing list, working with state specialty and medical societies, and communicating with state legislators.

The College also developed a professional liability action kit to help chapters and Fellows deal with the current malpractice insurance crisis. Fellows from around the country have noted problems with rapidly increasing professional liability insurance premiums or with their ability to purchase insurance at any price. The kit details a series of action steps, including writing legislators, governors, and insurance commissioners (with sample letters to follow) and working with state medical and surgical specialty societies through coalitions. It also provides contact information for various groups, individuals, and entities. Finally, the kit contains some sample letters for use in contacting local media outlets (easily accessible through the Legislative Action Center described earlier in this article).

The professional liability action kit has its own Web page. Be sure to visit it and make use of its materials when it comes time to push for tort reform in your state.

Final thoughts

Advocacy efforts need to begin now in order to prepare for the 2003 state legislative sessions. Whether the issue is scope of practice, tort reform, Medicare payment, regulation of office-based surgery, or one of particular concern in a specific state, legislators and other government officials need to know how these policies affect the practice of surgery and access to care. Visit the College Web site to find out the latest on a particular issue and new action alerts for the Legislative Action Center. Check your e-mail regularly, as this is often the fastest way to alert Fellows and chapters about contacting legislators. 