Advocacy Tips Presented at “Medicine’s Muscle”

Advocacy leaders from the Missouri State Medical Association presented tips on legislative advocacy and gave an update on current legislative issues at “Medicine’s Muscle” on August 27 at the KCMS office in Kansas City. A large group of KCMS members attended.

The key to success in grassroots lobbying is to build relationships with legislators, said Heidi Geisbuhler Sutherland, MSMA director of legislative affairs.

Physicians should determine, if they haven’t already, who are the state representative and senators for the districts where they live and where they practice. The Missouri House and Senate websites each have a “legislator lookup” tool.

In contacting a legislator by email, you should “make sure to note that you are a physician who lives or practices in their district,” Geisbuhler Sutherland said. If you are following a form letter, be sure to add personal details.

She suggested that email can serve a variety of purposes:
• Ask your legislator's position on a bill
• Urge your legislator to act on a bill
• Thank your legislator for supporting physicians and patients.
• Offer to be a resource on health care issues.

She also described using phone calls to reach legislators. “Be prepared to speak with legislative staff. They are more often able to devote the time necessary to talk about your topic. If you are calling about legislation, make sure to have the bill number on hand. Keep your message clear and concise. Offer to send a follow-up email.”

Face-to-face meetings can be scheduled at the Capitol or in your home district, she said. Contact the legislator’s office. Before the meeting, note the bill number if you will be speaking about specific legislation. Prepare an outline of what you are going to say. If possible, you can develop a fact sheet or handout summarizing the topic. Be prepared to meet with a staff member.

During the meeting, be informative and non-confrontational, she advised. Thank the legislator for his or her time and offer your assistance with future health care issues.

After the meeting, send a brief thank-you note or email. You also can post a photo of yourself with the legislator on social media.

The MSMA legislative staff can provide support to physicians in setting up and conducting these meetings.

She offered tips on giving legislative testimony:
• Prepare notes and practice before you testify.
• Keep the testimony brief and concise—under three minutes.
• Share personal experiences and perspectives on how the issue affects you.
• Try to not read directly from a piece of paper.
• Contact MSMA legislative staff to let them know of your interest in testifying on a particular topic.

Two more actions that physicians can take:
• Sign up for the MSMA Physician of the Day program. Volunteer physicians serve in the Capitol from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. as the on-call physician for legislators and staff. Contact MSMA.
• Make plans to attend White Coat Day at the Capitol on Tuesday, March 3, 2020. See accompanying article.

“One contact from a ‘doc back home’ is worth 100 visits from us lobbyists. That’s why we encourage members to establish a rapport and reach out,” MSMA wrote in a recent weekly legislative briefing.

Missouri “White Coat Day” Set for March 3, 2020

Physicians and medical students from across Missouri are urged to attend White Coat Day on Tuesday, March 3, 2020, at the state Capitol in Jefferson City. Organized by the Missouri State Medical Association, the event is an opportunity to network and advocate on behalf of physicians and patients in the state.

The day begins at 9 a.m. in the Capitol rotunda with legislators and MSMA leaders delivering brief remarks on health care issues. Throughout the rest of the day, attendees are encouraged to meet with their local legislators, attend legislative sessions and network with fellow physicians. Lunch will be provided.

Some state medical specialty societies are planning to join the rally that day, so there may be additional meetings and presentations participants want to attend.

Registration is open at https://www.msma.org/white-coat-day.html. For more information, contact Heidi Geisbuhler Sutherland, MSMA legislative affairs director, at heidi@msma.org.