



AND THE LAW

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ADVOCACY

To paraphrase John Godfrey Saxe; *laws are like sausages, it's better not to see them being made.* I am not an expert on sausages, but I would disagree with this comment with regards to laws. Even if we don't get involved in the making of laws, we will be subject to them nonetheless. Pharmacists can ill afford to be impacted by laws drafted by those who know nothing about pharmacy.

Unfortunately for many of us, lobbying is a word with very negative connotations. It projects images of under the table dealings and improper exchanges of cash. So how do we inform lawmakers of the impact of proposed laws on the practice of pharmacy? Through advocacy.

Advocacy is simply the act of supporting a cause, an idea, or a proposed policy. Many state and national associations organize advocacy meetings for their members. While we can all do this individually, a group of concerned citizens visiting the lawmaker's office together can certainly make a larger impact. The purpose of these visits is to educate the lawmaker and their staff on

proposed laws that impact our profession. We might be in favor of a proposal, opposed to it or want to amend the language as presented.

Lawmakers are serving because they want to make a positive difference in our society. However, they are not experts in every field. There is only one pharmacist, Buddy Carter of Georgia, in the 114th Congress. The other Senators and Representatives need pharmacists' help to understand how proposals will affect pharmacy practice.

I have participated in advocacy meetings on both the state and national level. In my experience, the lawmakers and staffers are eager to hear how proposals will affect constituents in their districts. The meetings usually consist of an introduction, explanation of why you are there, what the real impact in their district will be, and what action you want them to take. For pharmacists, the potential impact is not always direct. The impact may be on our patients; denying access, increasing costs, or creating hurdles to care. Of course, these indirect impacts will have impact on your pharmacy practice. Many times

the true impact on patients is not readily apparent. Pharmacists can explain how a particular policy will make it more difficult for patients to get their medications. Don't expect immediate action. It is always a pleasant surprise to get a commitment, but many times the materials that you provide are circulated in the office before decisions are made.

Not all advocacy has to take place in Washington, D.C. or your state capital. Invite your lawmaker to visit your pharmacy while they are home in the district. Then they will get to see first-hand what you are doing for your patients, their constituents. You can also advise them about how proposed laws will impact your ability to provide these services. First-hand knowledge and stories of real impacts (not just theoretical ones) will have the most influence on the process.

If pharmacists don't educate lawmakers about the effects of the changes on their practices and their patients, who will? Don't think of it as lobbying. We are really educating our lawmakers. Joining and participating in professional organizations is a good way to get started. In the end, the profession will benefit and ultimately, our patients will too.

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