

HEADING TO THE HILL

Radiologists from the ACR Association take their message to Congress to build connections and advocate on the specialty's behalf.

By James Brice

More than 500 ACR members visited about 250 congressional offices to thank their senators and representatives for recent legislative successes and to solicit support for a Medicare benefit covering low-dose CT lung cancer screening.

Longtime participants in the annual trip to Capitol Hill were pleased with the positive tone of discussions with congressional staff. Radiologists expressed their thanks for April's passage of a sustainable growth rate (SGR) patch containing top objectives on the ACR's legislative agenda. Chief among these concepts was language mandating that referring physicians consult national medical specialty society–developed appropriateness criteria prior to referring Medicare patients for advanced diagnostic imaging. The passage of the SGR patch averted the anticipated 24 percent SGR-related Medicare rate cut. The moratorium will expire on March 15, 2015.

Participating radiologists also thanked their members of Congress for a dampening provision that caps the magnitude of future Medicare reimbursement cuts and a transparency requirement that instructs CMS to disclose the data used to justify a multiple procedure payment reduction to the professional component of advanced diagnostic imaging procedures. Background information and talking points on these issues can be found at <http://bit.ly/ACROnTheHill>.

Kate A. Feinstein, MD, FACR, a past president of both the Illinois Radiological Society and Chicago Radiological Society, said the visits were notable for the lack of critical comments. "It was a positive experience," she said. "There were no complaints about radiologists contributing to higher health care costs. We weren't accused of being part of the problem."

Phillip M. Devlin, MD, FACR, president of the Massachusetts Radiological

Society, was pleased when an aide for Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) revealed the senator's interest in increased National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding. "She asked whether the radiologists of Massachusetts could support them with factual information on the positive effects of research, especially concerning the health of underserved and underprivileged people," he said. The ACR continues to monitor the potential downstream impacts of declining NIH funding.

Miami-based radiologist Daryl Eber, MD, and fellow councilors from the Florida Radiological Society learned from an aide to Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) that the death of the senator's father in 2010 was attributed to lung cancer. The information led to a discussion about the potential value of low-dose CT screening in the battle against this deadly disease. A chest radiologist from Mayo Clinic, Jacksonville who participated in the meeting described the clinical stages of lung cancer and its 15 percent five-year survival rate.

In addition, a radiation oncologist stressed the importance of early detection through low-dose CT lung cancer screening and the demonstrated 20 percent mortality reduction from its use in high-risk patients. The group concluded the meeting by asking the aide to urge Rubio to add his signature to a "Dear Colleague" letter authored by Senators Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) urging CMS to cover the procedure.

The Ohio delegation addressed the same talking points in meetings with aides for Representatives Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio) and David Joyce (R-Ohio), noted Esther Udoji, MD, a third-year radiology resident at Cleveland Clinic. Udoji, a recent participant in the ACR's Rutherford-Lavanty Fellowship, drew upon her experiences in Washington, D.C. earlier in 2014 to deliver the

message during her most recent visit to Capitol Hill.

Daniel Finelli, MD, FACR, president of the Ohio Radiological Society's executive council, thanked the representatives for contributing to the ACR's recent legislative victories and asked them to sign a House version of the "Dear Colleague" letter seeking Medicare coverage of low-dose CT lung cancer screening. David Joyce ultimately agreed to cosign the House "Dear Colleague" letter. During lunch, Congressman Fred Upton (R-Mich.), current chair of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, spoke to Hill attendees and thanked them for taking the time from their practice to educate members of Congress on issues important to the radiology profession.

To capitalize on the momentum generated from the visits to Capitol Hill, the Government Relations Department needs member support throughout the year on advocacy efforts, especially those related to the Radiology Advocacy Network. More information can be found at <http://bit.ly/RadAdvocacyNetwork>. //

MEET YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Don't forget that RADPAC® can assist in getting a member of Congress from your state to speak at your chapter meetings or tour your practice. For more information, contact Ted Burnes, director of the ACR Association's RADPAC and political education, at tburnes@acr.org.

