



Guess Who's Coming to Our Cancer Center?

by Brenda Gordon, RN, MSN, OCN®

In 2002 Congressman Mark Foley (R-Fla.) paid a visit to our cancer center. Having a legislator tour our facility was a very positive experience for all concerned. How did it happen?

We invited him. Sounds simple? Well, actually, it was. In February 2002, during my first week on the job as cancer program administrator at Jupiter Medical Center in Jupiter, Florida, Representative Foley was visiting our hospital's cardiopulmonary rehab area. I introduced myself, talked to the congressman about the work we do at the Ella Milbank Foshay Cancer Center, and invited him to visit our program.

Several months later, our hospital CEO called to tell me that Congressman Foley, who was visiting the hospital regarding another matter, would be stopping by the cancer center—in 30 minutes! When the congressman arrived, I took him to our chemotherapy area. The congressman had the opportunity to see for himself that every chair was filled. He could note firsthand the high-tech, specialized equipment and the complexity of cancer treatment. Congressman Foley could see how hard our staff works. He also interacted with our patients. Chatting with patients, he learned about how people with cancer go about living their daily lives and heard about how frequently they receive treatment and for how long. And the congressman could see just how patient-focused our work is.

Steps to Advocacy

Advocacy is not always easy. But I've found that whenever I've gone into a congressional office and met with staff, they have been

welcoming and interested in what I have to say.

ACCC staff has provided some wonderful guidance on how to talk with elected representatives about oncology issues. I attended several ACCC-ONS Policy Institutes, which offer oncology nurses and other members of the oncology team an opportunity to learn how to be powerful and effective advocates for cancer care services.

If you would like to let a legislator know about your cancer program and how the landmark Medicare reform legislation is affecting your facility, here are some tips on setting up a meeting. Any type of communication to a member of congress is good; however, personalized letters explaining your experiences with cancer care stand out. Be aware that mail to the U.S. Capitol is still being delayed due to precautionary handling measures, so you may want to send your letter to the member's local office. I usually fax my letters to both the Washington office and the local office. E-mail communication is the fastest, most direct way to reach Hill staff.

When trying to arrange a congressional visit, be patient. It may take several tries to reach staff to schedule a visit. Don't be discouraged if your appointment is rescheduled due to the Congress's fluid schedule. ACCC's government affairs staff can assist you in setting up these visits and is eager to do so.

Plan ahead for the meeting by preparing anecdotal data on how your hospital/office and patients have been affected by changes in reimbursement.

During the meeting:

- Provide a brief description of

your hospital/office. Include details such as whether you are a rural provider or academic institution and the number of cancer patients you see each year.

- Discuss how your hospital/office is adjusting to changes in reimbursement.
- Remind legislators how their constituents are affected by the work you do and how your concerns will directly affect those in their districts.
- If you can't answer a question, make a note and let the legislator know you will follow up.
- Have business cards ready.
- Write a thank-you note to those you've met with.

Remember, members of Congress and their staffs are busy. Don't be surprised if your visit is interrupted or begins late.

Recently, we invited Congressman E. Clay Shaw, Jr. (R-Fla.), who is a lung cancer survivor, to speak at our cancer center's annual Celebration of Life. First, we extended a verbal invitation to his local aide. Then, we followed up with a written invitation sent via fax. Congressman Shaw graciously agreed to speak at our program, even though he was already scheduled for another event that day. He finished his first speech, then raced to our cancer center and arrived in time to provide inspiring and insightful remarks.

Invite a member of Congress to visit your cancer center? Yes, you can. And one visit may be worth a thousand words. ☐

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