

# 1st PERSON



## Grassroots Advocacy: *You Hold the Key*

by Matthew Farber, MA

**Y**ou've probably heard it before: the first goal of an elected official is to get re-elected. In the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, we have ample evidence that numerous lawmakers were unable to achieve that goal. Last November's elections resulted in one of the largest classes of freshman lawmakers in recent history being voted into office.

The important take away for ACCC members? The election brought dozens of new lawmakers to Capitol Hill who likely have very little familiarity with the issues facing the oncology community. And this inexperience presents an opportunity for ACCC to help inform these new legislators about the complex and critical challenges confronting cancer care providers.

Several years ago, I contributed a column to this space with tips for conducting a grassroots campaign. I stressed the importance of staying positive, not being discouraged, and being proactive in your efforts. While


these tips still hold true, this March ACCC is offering the opportunity to take the next step—actually participate in a grassroots effort.

ACCC will be hosting a Capitol Hill Day on March 24 as a free pre-conference to the Association's 37<sup>th</sup> Annual National Meeting in Washington, D.C. The day will begin with a *Grassroots 101 Session*, preparing attendees to meet with their legislators and to deliver key messages effectively. We will talk about crafting your message and the importance of staying on target. At events like these, it's very easy to change direction and alter the conversation. But indecision can deflate your momentum and dilute or destroy your message. The end result may be that the Hill staff with whom you're meeting will likely not remember the main points of your visit. When participating in a grassroots advocacy event like ACCC's Capitol Hill visit day, it is vital to hone your message to three or four

talking points, and then stick to those points in all your conversations. We will prepare fact sheets for our members to leave behind in offices after their visits, and we will also provide our members with all the information they need to confidently talk about these issues and their importance to community cancer care providers.

This year, during its Capitol Hill Day event, ACCC will be highlighting several key issues: support of chemotherapy teaching codes for physicians and for nurses; support for reimbursement for patient navigation services; and support for the elimination of the prompt pay discount from the calculation of ASP. In addition to trying to get support for inclusion of an issue in legislation, we also want ACCC to be recognized as an educational resource for members of Congress and their staff. When questions about the importance of patient navigation, or reimbursement for chemotherapy teaching, or other concerns regarding the delivery of cancer care in the community are raised, we want members of Congress to turn to ACCC and its membership for answers.

But our advocacy efforts will not end with this grassroots event. Hill staffers have meetings all day every day on a wide variety of issues. Follow up is a key step in ensuring your visit and your issues are remembered. After the visit, a thank-you email or letter is always appreciated, and it can go a long way in helping to associate ACCC with the issues that were raised.

Finally, while success can be measured in many different ways, the success of ACCC's grassroots advocacy efforts rest on its membership. ACCC members—you hold the key. 

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### ACCC's Advocacy Efforts for You and Your Patients

A major policy focus of the Association is to lead efforts to assure that cancer programs are adequately funded, thereby allowing you—our members—to do you what you best: provide quality care to cancer patients across the country. ACCC works to ensure that future APC rates appropriately reflect the cost of cancer care in the outpatient setting. In CMS's 2011 final Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System rule, the agency increased reimbursement for drugs and pharmacy services to ASP+5 from the 2010 rate of ASP+4. Over the past three years, ACCC has advocated in meetings with CMS staff and in testimony before the APC Panel for an increase in the ASP rate—in part—to address pharmacy overhead costs, which are not reimbursed. Most recently ACCC has been working with state society members to address issues stemming from the recent unprecedented prescription drug shortages. Stay current by visiting the advocacy section of ACCC's website at <http://www.accc-cancer.org/advocacy/>.

