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Talking the Talk

ACCC members deliver their message to Capitol Hill

by Sydney Abbott, JD

On Thursday, March 24, the day before ACCC's 37th Annual National Meeting, the Association hosted a Capitol Hill Day. After attending a *Grassroots 101 Session*, 40 ACCC members from 19 states went to Capitol Hill to talk with their elected officials about issues affecting community cancer programs. ACCC members met with staff from both their representatives' and senators' offices for a total of more than 70 congressional visits.

The meetings went well and focused on three advocacy issues: 1) the need for chemotherapy teaching codes, 2) the unprecedented oncology drug shortages, and 3) the removal of the prompt pay discount from Medicare reimbursement. ACCC members asked their legislators to support two recently introduced bills relevant to these issues. The "Preserving Access to Life-Saving Medications Act" (S. 296), which would shift reporting responsibility for drug shortages from providers to manufacturers. The bill requires manufacturers to report upcoming production stoppages *before* manufacturing stops, intending to give providers more warning to alter treatment regimens and hopefully encourage manufacturers to eliminate unnecessary shortages.

And, H.R. 905, the "Prompt Pay Bill," which suggests following Medicaid's lead by removing the prompt pay discount customarily provided to distributors from the reimbursement calculation for Medicare, since providers generally do not see the savings.

In their meetings, many ACCC members shared how their programs and practices are struggling to provide quality care in the face of inadequate reimbursement and insufficient drug supply. Their stories were well received and certain Congressional staffers offered their own family experiences with cancer.

In follow-up communications from ACCC's Capitol Hill Day, the Association has fielded questions from Hill staff on current drug shortage protocol and the effect on community cancer centers. As this article goes to press, ACCC's Capitol Hill day advocacy efforts were already showing results. By April 22, four new co-sponsors had been enlisted for S. 296 and H.R. 905, plus new companion legislation had been introduced in the Senate for the Prompt Pay Bill (S. 733). For more information, read my blog post <http://accbuzz.wordpress.com/2011/04/21/capitol-hill-visits-reap-results/>.

And remember, there are many

opportunities for grassroots advocacy in *your* hometown. Consider inviting your Representative or Senator to tour your facility and hear what your staff does for their constituents each day. Read about Congressman Mark Foley's (R-Fla.) 2002 visit to ACCC-member program Jupiter Medical Center at: http://www.accc-cancer.org/oncology_issues/articles/sepoc04/first-person.pdf.

Observing firsthand staff caring for patients in the infusion area and seeing in person highly advanced technology and its importance to people being treated for cancer can deliver a powerful message to your Congressmen. If your cancer program or oncology practice wants to arrange a Congressional site visit, contact ACCC's director of Provider Economics and Public Policy at: mfarber@acc-cancer.org.

While ACCC is pleased at the success of its 2011 Capitol Hill Day, the Association and its members need to keep "talking the talk" to our elected officials so that they fully understand the critical services community cancer centers bring to their communities ☐

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Member Programs that Participated in ACCC's 2011 Capitol Hill Day

- CHW Mercy Hospital, Florence R. Wheeler Cancer Center, Bakersfield, Calif.
- Florida Hospital Waterman Cancer Institute, Tavares, Fla.
- The Cancer Center at Northeast Georgia Health, Inc., Gainesville, Ga.
- Iowa Cancer Specialists, Genesis Health System, Davenport, Iowa
- Mountain States Tumor Institute at St. Luke's Regional Medical Center, Boise, Idaho
- Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center at Northwestern Medical Faculty Foundation, Chicago, Ill.
- Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, Feist-Weiller Cancer Center, Shreveport, La.
- Maine Center for Cancer Medicine, Scarborough, Maine
- Maine Medical Center, a Member of the MaineHealth Family, Portland, Maine
- Penobscot Bay Medical Center, Rockport, Maine
- FirstHealth Moore Regional Hospital, Pinehurst, N.C.
- New Hanover Regional Medical Center, Zimmer Cancer Center, Wilmington, N.C.
- Alamance Regional Medical Center, Alamance Cancer Center, Burlington, N.C.
- West Penn Allegheny Oncology Network, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Lancaster General Hospital, Lancaster, Pa.
- Skagit Valley Hospital Regional Cancer Care Center, Mount Vernon, Wash.
- Seattle Cancer Care Alliance, Seattle, Wash.
- Franciscan Skemp Healthcare, Cancer Center, La Crosse, Wisc.