

# ACCC Annual Meeting Spurs Government Relations Initiatives

## ACCC HOSTS CONGRESSIONAL BREAKFAST

The subject of government relations pervaded the ACCC National Meeting in Washington, DC, which sponsored a Congressional Breakfast featuring two legislative aides as keynote speakers. Sherry Hayes, Health Legislative Assistant to Sen. Paul Simon (D-IL) and Phil Sharpe, General Counsel to Sen. Brock Adams (D-WA), provided an "insider's view" of how health legislation and Congressional interest in health issues, such as CCOP funding can be sparked to a group of 110 ACCC members and 35 Congressional aides. David King, M.D., and Lee E. Mortenson, provided aides and members with details of the Association's two major Congressional initiatives: appropriate drug reimbursement language in the pending catastrophic bill and increased funding for NCI's CCOP program.

Hayes highlighted some of the legislative activity currently pending that will affect cancer care, including the reauthorization of the National Cancer Act. She also noted the "flurry of activity" on the Hill regarding home care and its possible inclusion in the Catastrophic Insurance Bill that is currently in conference committee. In addition, two bills on financing long-term care are "in committee" Hayes said.

Another critical bill on the Congressional calendar, is the Comprehensive AIDS Research and Care bill, Hayes said, which presents issues surrounding the formulation of a national AIDS policy. The current bill declares AIDS as a "public health emergency," she said, and calls for increased staffing at NCI, FDA, and the Centers for Disease Control. The bill, if passed, would also expedite grant approval processes for AIDS research, develop a comprehensive research effort, initiate a health care worker training program, and fund additional care and treatment programs.

Hayes called the Medicare Catastrophic Health bill "one of the most significant pieces of health legislation in this Congress," noting that there have been 86 recommendations by the Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Bowen that expand and modify the proposed legislation.

Phil Sharpe provided ACCC partici-

pants with suggestions on how to develop effective lobbying techniques. Noting that most special interest groups are "highly organized" and have professional lobbyists on their staffs, he suggested that ACCC "marshall its limited resources and marshal them in an effective manner." To that end, he discouraged ACCC from following what he called the mass mailing mentality, saying that members of Congress are inundated with form letters—a technique he doesn't believe is effective. Instead, he suggested that the Association focus on two important elements of the legislative process: the introduction of bills and their referral to committee.

"If you have a particular interest," he said, "you must find a legislative vehicle to reshape a bill or to get a new bill introduced." On the committee level, it's important to be cognizant of the power of committee chairmen. "They are the ultimate authors and the decisionmakers as to whether a bill is sent to the floor or allowed to die in their committee." You must look for support from committee members and look at the committee to which the bill will be referred.

As a starting point, Sharpe suggested that ACCC members educate the staffs of Congressional members. Other important players to focus on include committee minority leaders and key committee members who are willing to sponsor or cosponsor your legislation. The "vested interest" of a sponsor will help to ensure steerage of a bill through committee and to the floor, Sharpe said.

Other important points Sharpe made were to first, support the development of a legislative affairs department. "It's unrealistic to expect members to come to Washington once or twice a year and become experts on the legislative process," he contended. "You need people to track the political winds" that will affect the chances of success of your legislative initiatives.



*Phil Sharpe (above) and Sherry Hayes (right) provided an "insider's view" of Washington*

Second, he said, "Your goals must be realistic." You must be "willing to act on the advice" of your legislative affairs department.

Third, "target your efforts," Sharpe said. Lobbying is the development and implementation of a strategy to achieve your goals. You must "develop a concrete plan for achieving your goals, follow-through on those initiatives, and develop a political philosophy that is compatible with your organization."

Fourth, you must develop credibility with the staff who are "actually doing the work," Sharpe noted. The simple way to achieve credibility is to be "knowledgeable about your subject and what you are trying to achieve; be aware of the "down sides" of your goals; and be honest. "Understand the political obstacles that confront the members of Congress you are dealing with and try to look at the issues from their perspective." And, Sharpe said, "understand that sometimes the answer is no, but remember that politics is the art of compromise and often the answer is maybe. Never burn your bridges. The majority of members want to help and may do so indirectly."

## ACCC GOES TO THE HILL

In addition to the 35 legislative aides at the Congressional breakfast, 20 ACCC delegates continued the annual sojourn to Capital Hill during the Association's Annual Meeting. Predominant issues of discussion included CCOP funding, chemotherapy reimbursement, the Catastrophic Health Act, the National Cancer Institute's bypass budget, and problems with DRGs.