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American Academy of Pediatrics 2005 Legislative Conference
Section on Emergency Medicine Advocacy Scholarship
May 2005

The American Academy of Pediatrics 2005 Legislative Affairs Conference provided a unique opportunity to learn how to become more active, effective advocates for the children we treat. The conference included workshops which taught how to use the media to promote awareness of children's health issues. During these discussions, workshop leaders provided tips on giving interviews to newspaper, television, or radio and they discussed the effectiveness of op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. These activities taught me the importance of advocacy and how to incorporate it into my career in relatively simple ways. I learned that taking the time to call or write to state or federal congressional leaders, talking to the media, writing a letter to the editor, or even just becoming part of an e-mail network like the Academy's Federal Advocacy Action Network (FAAN) can truly make a difference in the quality of care we are able to provide to our patients.

The legislative conference began with remarks by Dr. Carol Berkowitz, AAP president who set the tone of the conference by noting that the AAP is an academy of "pediatrics", not just an association for the welfare of pediatricians, and therefore it is our responsibility to advocate for the advancement of children's healthcare. Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), spoke about integrating pediatric research into practice and she discussed some of the positive effects the Agency has noted after implementation of ADHD guidelines. Prior to our visits with congressional leaders on Capital Hill, the Honorable Jane Harman of California spoke about the importance of letting our concerns be known through advocacy. She reiterated the important message that if we do not stand up for the children we serve, no one else will.

The legislative focus of this year's conference was protecting Medicaid benefits for all children. With Congress and the President currently proposing significant budget cuts to the Medicaid program, the concern of the AAP is that these cuts could be detrimental to children's eligibility or entitlement benefits. Interestingly, children enrolled in Medicaid make up 50% of all participants, yet they cost the program only 15% of the overall expenditures. Additionally, the number of uninsured children, which is now between 9 and 11 million, could increase substantially, making the nation's young people even more vulnerable. Congress is currently debating urgent Medicaid budget issues. The AAP obviously supports a budget with no Medicaid cuts; if cuts are necessary, they should only take place after a committee examines the needs and effectiveness of the Medicaid program. The Academy fears that Congress will pass a budget with significant cuts, and that states will then have to decide how to implement their already strained programs with reduced budgets.

As pediatricians and emergency physicians we see first hand the effects of limited funding, health-care cuts, and uninsured children; whether it be long ED waits, difficulty finding quality primary or subspecialty care for some of our underinsured children, or the

difficulties we face finding funding for projects or research which may advance pediatric emergency health. While not specifically addressed at the conference, but of particular concern to those in our field, are the proposed budgetary cuts involving EMSC, and the impact this could have on collaborative pediatric emergency research.

One of the recurring themes of the conference was that children cannot advocate for themselves. Since they cannot vote, they do not make up an influential group in Washington, DC. Therefore, we have a responsibility to our patients to advocate on their behalf. On the last day of the conference, we were warmly received by our congressional leaders and their staff members. As Senator Chuck Schumer told my group of New York pediatricians, our work fighting for children's healthcare is both recognized and appreciated. We are not paid lobbyists. We are not fighting for our own monetary compensation. We are fighting to provide the best healthcare possible to America's children.