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AAP Legislative Conference 2005

The 2005 AAP Legislative Conference was an excellent learning experience and introduction to the art of lobbying and advocacy for children's health care. As I finish my fellowship in pediatric emergency this year, I am grateful for the opportunity to expand my role as an advocate for children with formal instruction on the background and current issues surrounding children's health care in the United States, and hands-on workshops focused on developing and delivering a message to federal and state officials.

The focus of the conference was three-fold. The first goal was how to use our expertise in pediatrics to educate our politicians about the health care of children. Secondly, we learned how to more effectively communicate and approach our senators and representatives during personal visits and written letters. Finally, the last step was to be able to compromise with the officials to work toward a mutually acceptable resolution for children's health care. The conference culminated in personal visits to the Senators' and House of Representatives' offices on Capitol Hill to deliver our message to protect Medicaid and SCHIP for American children. The goals of the conference were taught by experienced pediatric lobbyists in the AAP, and we had ample opportunities to practice and refine our skills to successfully advocate for the protection of Medicaid. We also gained a new perspective on the difficulties and frustrations that politicians face from the multitude of issues they are presented on a daily basis, and gained a deeper understanding of how decisions are made in the government. Specific workshops also focused on other elements of children's health care, including influence of the media on the public's perspectives, as well as medical liability and patient safety which affect the costs of health care.

As physicians in the emergency department, we are frequently involved in the evaluation and care of children who are the unfortunate result of the difficulty in providing preventative health care to all children in the United States. Although one of our primary goals is to provide emergent care to sick children, many parents will turn to emergency departments when they are unable to access the well-child care, anticipatory guidance, and medications they need. It is crucially important to understand the background history as well as progress that have been made in this effort to ensure that children, one of the most vulnerable populations to be affected by Medicaid cuts, continue to receive the best care possible. It is only fitting that pediatric emergency physicians play an active role in advocacy and remain involved to protect health care for these children, as we may be the only pediatricians who can assure their future health and safety.