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Section on Emergency Medicine Advocacy Scholarship  
2016 AAP Legislative Conference  

The 25th American Academy of Pediatrics Legislative Conference was held at the Mayflower Renaissance Hotel on April 3-5, 2016. Over 130 pediatricians from across the country gathered in Washington, DC to advocate on behalf our patients, giving children a voice with our elected officials. The three-day conference was grounded on the historic philosophy of the Academy while striving to achieve its current advocacy campaign.

Founded in 1930, the AAP was created to advocate on behalf of our patients and their families. The current advocacy campaign is FACE Poverty, a multidisciplinary approach to tackle socioeconomic barriers that impact our children and our communities. When 20% of children in the United States live at or below the poverty line, it is important to remember that poverty does not discriminate and that the deleterious effects of poverty impact children from the nation’s capital to remote villages of Alaska’s Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. The campaign’s primary goals are to address: Food security, Access to health care, Community, and Education.

As a recipient of the Senator Daniel Inouye & Cal Sia Advocacy Scholarship, I was honored and excited to represent the Section on Emergency Medicine at the AAP Legislative Conference. The conference brought together pediatricians from all levels of training, from seasoned attendings that have attended all 25 Legislative Conferences, to medical students, who in 3 short months will embark on the journey to become pediatricians at their respective residencies. Equally attended by general pediatricians and pediatric specialists, the conference brought together doctors who are passionate about improving the lives of children.

The conference was structured to provide pediatricians with the tools to become effective lobbyists. Day 1 was an introduction into politics and advocacy. Day 2 focused on the Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill and provided opportunities to develop and refine our message. The Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016 is a bipartisan bill that has been unanimously passed by the Senate Agriculture Committee. The final and 3rd day of the conference was where we brought together our expertise as pediatricians with our new skills as pediatric advocates, and ascended to the Hill to partner with our senators and representatives.

One of my favorite moments of the conference was during the post-Hill visit debriefing session, when our very own Chuck Pruitt, MD, Associate Professor of Pediatric Emergency Medicine from the University of Utah shared his experiences on the Hill. A dynamic speaker, Chuck effectively used humor to highlight his efforts to establish an ongoing relationship with the elected officials from the great state of Utah. His story was a stellar example for the residents and fellows in attendance, and it will serve him well as he continues to be an advocacy leader in his role as the President-elect of the Utah Chapter of the AAP.

Anne Edwards, MD and Marsha Raulerson, MD, the Chairs of the AAP Committee on State/Federal Government Affairs, respectively, rallied the troops with their infectious energy and enthusiasm. One of the most tangible lessons that I learned from the conference, was from a joint lecture by Anne and Marsha, titled “Speaking Up for Children: Advocacy in Our Capitols”. While we advocate for our patients every day in our clinical practices, it was great to learn techniques and tips to be better advocates on the community, state, and federal levels. Over a dozen opportunities were highlighted, which ranged from advocacy in 5 minutes or less all the way to multiple day opportunities like attending the AAP Legislative Conference.
Some of my favorites:

- Identify a patient story to frame your advocacy
- Share your message with your patients’ families, colleagues, friends, and family members
- Put your legislator’s number in your phone; Call them and tell them what’s important
- Create an elevator speech about the issues that are important
- Write a letter to the editor or op-ed
- VOTE!

As I continue to develop my expertise as a Pediatric Emergency Medicine physician, I am excited to discover the intersections of medicine and advocacy. The AAP Legislative Conference was a fantastic introduction on how we can collaborate with our elected officials to protect and support children and their families. I highly recommend attending the 2017 Legislative Conference. Benard Dreyer, MD, the current President of the AAP, said “our voices are strongest when we speak together”. And as pediatricians we hold a unique and valuable experience that provides a voice for the most vulnerable populations. The immediate past AAP present, Sandra Hassink, MD, summed it up best, “Advocacy is creating the moment when change can occur.”

Thank you to the Section of Emergency Medicine for giving me the opportunity to attend this fantastic conference. I would love to continue to conversation, please email me with comments, questions, or opportunities to collaborate!