



The Importance of Advocacy

Karen R. Horowitz, MD

This week, the US House of Representatives passed HR 2, a bill to reform Medicare payments to physicians and repeal the standard growth rate fix. Hopefully, by the time you read this, the Senate will approve the bill, and it will go to President Obama for his anticipated final signature. This would not have been possible without the strong advocates among us who have given voice to the perspective of physicians in our public discourse. I am proud of the public voice of SGIM members who, along with the American College of Physicians and other organizations, have lobbied hard for this initiative.

It is easy for us to become complacent and let others decide the political future of our profession. We retreat to our own agendas, mired in the tasks of patient care, research, teaching, and (oh, yeah!) the de-

mands of our personal lives. Over the past 15 years, we have seen a paradigm shift in our careers. We have opted out of "private practice." Some have profited from the sale of busy practices to health care systems. Others have just been driven out of business by economic pressures and the burdens on private practice as we knew it. It is impossible to estimate how many of us have made career choices in order to satisfy personal professional interests and how many were driven there by economic disparities and the burden of educational debt. As long as maintenance of certification (MOC) targeted only the recent graduate, there was little regulation of its growth and impact. It is only in the past year, when the American Board of Internal Medicine changed its approach to physicians formerly credentialed with lifelong

certification, that senior-level physicians (i.e. those who wield power in academic medicine) have banded together to confront the contentious beast that MOC has become.

These remarkable events are the tangible results of thoughtful debate that has played out over years of advocacy for our profession. This issue of *Forum* highlights the health policy initiatives of SGIM and the work of its members. Through these efforts, the SGIM Health Policy Committee works for each of us to strengthen our profession and broaden our opportunities. There is still much work to be done. If you are interested in participating in Health Policy Committee initiatives, contact Francine Jetton (jettonf@sgim.org) or Tom Staiger, Health Policy Committee chair, (staiger@u.washington.edu) to learn more.

SGIM