

HEALTH POLICY CORNER

SGIM Members Create Impact for GIM

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It will certainly come as no surprise to SGIM members that they and their colleagues in general internal medicine are well represented in the halls of the federal government. SGIM members and many other leaders of general internal medicine have traditionally been prominent in a wide variety of departments, offices, and agencies in and around the Washington, DC, area.

For example, Dr. Karen DeSalvo is currently the acting assistant secretary of health at the department of health and human services. Dr. Eliseo J. Perez-Stable is the director of the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD), one of the 27 institutes and centers that comprise the National Institutes of Health.

Most recently, Dr. Andy Bindman, a general internist and health services researcher who has been on the faculty at UCSF for 30 years, was appointed as the director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) by HHS Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell. At the SGIM's annual meeting in Florida, Dr. Bindman was actively engaged in meeting both formally and informally with SGIM members from the

Society's leadership to the Research Subcommittee of the Health Policy Committee to the general membership in a well-attended session that featured a wide-ranging discussion.

The discussions at the annual meeting were productive and forward-looking. Dr. Bindman was most generous in sharing his vision for a vibrant and impactful AHRQ, and very direct about articulating both its strengths and areas of anticipated future focus. His clear-eyed approach was a most welcome and refreshing one that portended good things to come for AHRQ and, therefore, for generalists, especially those SGIM members involved in health services research.

Beginning in mid-September, SGIM and AHRQ embarked on an experiment that we had not tried, in spite of a long history of members holding key positions. We initiated a series of Health Policy Committee conference calls to occur on a quarterly basis—either with the Research Subcommittee or the Health Policy Committee's (HPC) Executive Committee—on which Dr. Bindman will participate. The goal is to share thoughts and plans as appropriate, strengthen SGIM's input to AHRQ's

operations, and build a stronger cadre of advocates for general internal medicine.

On this first conference call, participants discussed important issues, including current and future funding, the relationships among AHRQ, the National Institutes of Health and the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, the need for clear educational materials about AHRQ's programs and activities, and patient safety.

SGIM benefits greatly from having its outstanding members and other leaders in GIM in key positions. With this new initiative—one that can be replicated with others who are willing and able to do so—SGIM has moved to new level of collaboration with an agency with which many members interact and many more may in the future.

SGIM members who wish to participate in these discussions and to broaden the level of health services research may e-mail Francine Jetton (jettonf@sgim.org) and ask to be added to the HPC Research community on GIM Connect and to participate in its monthly conference calls.