



## GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS IN CONGRESS

### WHY GET INVOLVED?

- ❖ It's your **right** to let elected officials know how you feel about important issues.
- ❖ It's your **responsibility** to speak out on matters that affect you and your patients.

### WHAT'S REQUIRED?

- ❖ **Learn** all the facts you need to make the strongest argument for your position.
- ❖ **Organize** your arguments and encourage others to get involved.
- ❖ **Contact** your elected officials.
- ❖ **Express** your views in a clear and concise and respectfully ask for a commitment from your elected officials.

### WHAT ARE THE METHODS?

- ❖ **Personal visits** are the most effective means of getting your point across.
- ❖ **Written communication** also gives you an opportunity to let your elected officials know where you stand.
- ❖ **E-mail and phone messages** allow you to convey your message when time is of the essence.

### WHEN DO YOU GET INVOLVED?

- ❖ Generally, it's best to express your views when legislation is in the early stages of review by a congressional committee or subcommittee. It is also important to remember that issues can arise on short notice. Quick action on everyone's part can mean the difference between success and failure.

## **HELPFUL HINTS WHEN VISITING A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE**

### **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT**

- ❖ It is important to make an appointment as early as possible. If you don't have the telephone number for the congressional office you want to visit, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
- ❖ If your Senator or Representative is unavailable, ask to meet with the legislative assistant who handles the issue of interest to you.

### **BE PREPARED**

- ❖ Review what you want to say in advance of your meeting.
- ❖ Explain how the issues you raise affect you and your community.

### **BE BRIEF**

- ❖ Since legislators and their staff have extremely busy schedules, plan on getting your message across in 5-10 minutes. Don't get sidetracked into small talk - make your time really count.

### **LISTEN CAREFULLY**

- ❖ Be prepared to answer questions. If you don't know the answer to a question, acknowledge that and offer to provide the answers later. Contact SGIM for any additional information you need.

### **BE FIRM**

- ❖ Try to find out exactly where your legislator stands on the issues, particularly as they affect your organization and its members. Ask what action he or she intends to take, and don't be afraid to press for specifics.

### **FOLLOW UP**

- ❖ Send a thank-you letter to the legislator and/or staff aide; include a summary of your views, together with any additional information that may be relevant. You may also want to make a follow-up call a week or two after your visit.

## **WRITING AN EFFECTIVE LETTER TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESS**

### **KEEP IT BRIEF AND TO THE POINT**

- ❖ Keep your letter reasonably brief and limit your subject matter to a single issue. State the issues clearly in the first paragraph, so that the letter can be assigned to the appropriate staff aide.

### **PERSONALIZE YOUR LETTER**

- ❖ Explain your position clearly and give the lawmaker reasons for supporting it. Make your communication your own. Stress how you and your patients—the lawmaker's constituents—will be affected and cite specific examples if you can. Don't limit your correspondence to slogans or phrases from a newsletter or form letter. Your own words will make the crucial difference.

### **BE POSITIVE**

- ❖ Frame your concerns in a way that captures the lawmaker's attention. Show your awareness of the lawmaker's past actions (i.e., cite the lawmaker's past voting record, public announcements, etc.)

### **ASK FOR A RESPONSE**

- ❖ To obtain a personal response, ask a thoughtful question about an issue that concerns you. Example, at the end of your letter - "Can I count on your support?"

### **FOCUS ON THE MERITS**

- ❖ Never threaten or beg a member of Congress. Always appeal to the lawmaker on the merits of an issue.

**WRITE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR AT THESE ADDRESSES:**

❖ **United States Senate**

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

❖ **United States House of Representatives**

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

**WRITE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR ONLINE AT THESE ADDRESSES:**

**United States Senate**

[www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)

**United States House of Representatives**

[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)

[www.house.gov/writerep](http://www.house.gov/writerep)