Introduction to Advocacy: A How-To Guide

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Based on
The National Center of Medical Home Initiatives for Children with Special Need, Every Child Deserve a Medical Home Training Curriculum, 2004: Advocacy
Goals

• Recognize the significance of advocacy.
• Realize that every Physiatrist has a role as an advocate.
• Identify steps you can take to advocate.
• Understand the power of coalitions to augment individual advocacy effort.
What is an Advocate?

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary:

**advocate (n.)**
– 1. One who pleads another’s cause
– 2. One who argues or pleads for a cause or proposal
Why Is Being an Advocate Important?

- Advances change that could result in benefit for a large population
- Keeps the interests of your patients and physiatry on the radar screen of decision makers
Why Should You Be an Advocate?

• As a Physiatrist, you are knowledgeable of the needs of patients with disabilities and the practice of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

• As a physician, you bring credibility to the issues and are most often seen as working on behalf of others.

• No one else may be advocating for our field or our particular patients.
Road Blocks to Advocacy

- Lack of time
- Lack of focus
- Lack of knowledge with the issue(s)
- Lack of comfort with advocacy process
How do You Get Started?

• Have an interest which has not been well addressed.
• Find out more about that interest.
• Join others who share your interest or ask them to join you.
• Join medical societies to share information and for assistance.
Interest

• Decide on 1 or 2 issues that particularly interest (or bother) you
• Become an expert by really get to know the issue(s)
• Identify all “players” involved in the issue
  – those that support and those that oppose
Speak Out on Your Issue

- Public hearings
- Letters to the editor
- Advisory boards
- Media Interviews
- Senior Centers
Polish Your Message

• Clear
• Compelling
• Memorable
Tell Your Story

• Identify the problem
• Avoid using technical/clinical language
• Describe a patient that best illustrates this problem
• Conclude with your clear, compelling and memorable solution to the problem
Become the "Go-To" Expert

• Cultivate relationships with decision makers

• Send information relating to your story without asking anything in return
Join or Form Coalitions
Coalition Benefits

• Access to more resources
  – Information, labor, perspective, expertise, etc.
• Avoid “reinventing the wheel”
• People with same interests are more likely to be effective by collaborating
# Partners

- AAPMR
- AMA
- State medical societies and specialty societies
- Disability groups
- Disease-oriented organizations
- Patient advocacy groups
- Government agencies
- Corporations
Incremental Success: Start with Small Bites

- Comprehensive change often require perfect alignment of multiple variables including luck
- A series of small success make the process manageable and less daunting
Take Home Messages
Advocacy and the Busy Physiatrist

- Speak out and tell your story
- Monitor the Legislative, Business and Clinical Practice Issues Section of www.AAPMR.org
- Wear a conspicuous button regarding your issue
- Support political candidates by making available their campaign brochures in your waiting room
Advocate for Others and Not Only for Yourself

- Focus on benefits to patients and families
- Explain the impact of your physiatric practice on the community
- Personalize your story with real-life examples from your clinical practice
Goals Recap

- The importance of advocacy for your patients and your physiatric practice.
- Every physiatrist has a role as an advocate.
- Steps you can take to advocate.
- The power of coalitions to enhance your individual advocacy action.
Thank you!