

ACG Practice Management Tool Box

Advocacy and Resources for Effective Political Action in Gastroenterology

AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

As healthcare policymakers embrace value-based care and integrated healthcare delivery, gastroenterologists must actively ensure that new healthcare policies reflect the current realities of GI practice. In this tool box article, we outline valuable resources for gastroenterologists to advocate on key issues affecting their patients and practice.

TOPIC OVERVIEW

An advocacy campaign is a set of actions targeted to create support for a policy or proposal. The ACG advocates for patients and GI clinicians. Advocacy designed to change systems is complex and difficult. Systems advocacy is defined as efforts imposed to change policy and practice at the local and national levels in order to change the situation for groups of individuals who share similar problems. While systems advocacy works to improve the system to the benefit of individuals, it is a long-term approach to problem-solving which requires a sustained effort. Advocacy therefore requires both a proactive approach and a great deal of stamina.

ACG'S ADVOCACY AND GUIDANCE

The ACG Board of Governors is tasked with advocating on your behalf, both at the federal and state/local level. ACG Governors have an annual Washington D.C. "fly-in" to meet with Congress and regulators in order to advocate for important ACG public policy initiatives. There are currently 77 Governors across seven different regions in the U.S. and abroad. One way to get involved in advocacy is to consider being an ACG Governor and advocate on behalf of colleagues in your state. Governors go through training prior to these visits so that they are comfortable with the material as well as with the process of meeting with legislators.

However, you do not have to be an ACG Governor to advocate on important policies impacting our practices and patients. The ACG website also hosts an online tool, where you can reach out to your state and federal elected officials on these important advocacy issues.

MEETING WITH YOUR CONGRESSPERSON

How to set up a meeting: Know who to contact

Most constituent meetings are handled and coordinated through the scheduler or the state/district directors. Other meetings may be scheduled directly through the staff, depending on your personal relationship with the office.

Who: Most likely meeting with young, legislative staff

Most likely you will not meet the member of Congress. Most staff will not know what a gastroenterologist does, and staff may not understand (for example) the importance of colon cancer screening. Thus, it is important to provide a background on the the basics of gastroenterology and GI patient care.

What: Likely discussing 2-3 topics

Keep it simple! The agenda will likely shift depending on questions and audience. If you are meeting with your representative/senator, the member will likely control the agenda. It is important to always discuss how a bill, law, or regulation impacts constituents and patient care in your local area. It is also important to anticipate questions and concerns. Not knowing the answer to a question can be a good thing, as it provides an opportunity for a follow-up discussion.

How long: Most meetings are roughly 30 minutes

This could change depending on the audience, setting, and interest in the specific policy issue(s). The more local/state-focused discussion, the more interested the staff or member will be.

Next: Maintaining lines of communication

It is important to stay in touch after the initial discussion: Send a brief thank you note/email afterwards, follow-up with regular emails/communications, invite them to visit in your practice, and participate in local meetings/town halls.

VALUABLE ADVOCACY AND POLITICAL ACTION RESOURCES FOR GASTROENTEROLOGISTS

There are many existing patient advocacy groups which focus on specific issues pertinent to a GI practice and its patients. There are also organizations looking for GI clinicians to join, as ACG members can be both an advocate and a subject-matter expert. The combination of a subject-matter expert, together with the patient's story, provide a unique and very impactful way to get your message across to policymakers and staff. Below is a list of prominent advocacy organizations and coalitions, and in which issues they specialize.

ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS AND COALITIONS

Name	Key issues	Link
AAMC Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased funding for the NIH	https://www.aamc.org/research/adhocgp/start.htm
Digestive Disease National Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continued federal research funding (NIH/NIDDK, continued implementation of 2009 National Commission on Digestive Disease Research, support for National Cancer Moonshot, Dept of Defense Peer Reviewed Medical Research Program, VA Medical and Prosthetics Research Program)• Patient access to care (Removing Barriers to Colorectal Cancer Screening Act, basic patient protections in the Affordable Care Act, access to nutritional care, FDA regulatory pathway for biosimilars)• Prevention and awareness (CDC Colorectal Cancer Prevention, Viral Hepatitis, and IBD programs)	http://www.ddnc.org

National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing colon cancer screening to 80% of the US population 	http://nccrt.org/about/task-groups/policy-action
Partnership to Improve Patient Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure and standards to support shared decision-making and patient-centered care • Support for the transparent development, implementation and evaluation of alternative payment models, and patient-centered quality and performance measures, for use in the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation • Prohibiting quality-adjusted life years as a basis for coverage decisions • Research funding for transparent and evidence-based comparative clinical effectiveness research and value assessment frameworks, specifically through PCORI 	http://www.pipccpatients.org

Participation in advocacy committees of professional medical societies can be an effective way to shape and lead the positions of these organizations. National GI societies offer other opportunities to advocate on behalf of our profession and patients as well. The strength of these efforts can be greater than that of individuals and individual societies.

POLITICALLY ACTIVE ASSOCIATIONS TARGETING SPECIFIC GASTROINTESTINAL DISEASES

- Alliance of Families Fighting Pancreatic Cancer (<http://www.affpc.org>)
- American Cancer Society (<https://www.cancer.org/>)
- American Liver Foundation (<https://liverfoundation.org/>)
- American Pancreatic Association (<http://www.american-pancreatic-association.org>)
- Celiac Disease Foundation (<https://celiac.org>)
- Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America (<http://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org>)
- Fight Colorectal Cancer (<https://fightcolorectalcancer.org/>)
- Gluten Intolerance Group (<https://www.gluten.org>)
- Hepatitis B Foundation (<http://www.hepb.org>)
- Hirshberg Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research (<http://pancreatic.org>)
- International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (<https://www.iffgd.org>)
- National Celiac Association (<https://nationalceliac.org>)
- National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable (<http://nvhr.org/>)
- No Stomach for Cancer (<https://www.nostomachforcancer.org>)

STATE PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES IN GASTROENTEROLOGY

The phrase, "all politics is local" is a common phrase in U.S. politics. The former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Tip O'Neill (D-MA) is associated with this introducing this phrase to Congress and the world of advocacy. State and local GI and medical societies also offer opportunities to make a difference in our profession.

You can use the ACG website to identify contacts so that you can get involved in state-specific issues affecting your practice (<http://gi.org/physician-resources/state-gi-societies>).

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR PRACTICE

1. Pay attention to local healthcare trends and politics.
2. Pay attention to national healthcare trends and politics.
3. Get to know your local legislators and how to contact them.
4. Communicate with your local legislators and become a resource for them.
5. Become active in your local GI society (if applicable).
6. Know and communicate with your ACG Governor.
7. Follow ACG Action Alerts.
8. Stay in touch with the ACG as your national organization.
9. Understanding major political party healthcare platforms.
 - Republican party (<https://www.gop.com/issue/health-care/>)
 - Democratic party (<https://democrats.org/issues/health-care/>)

CONCLUSION

Political action is critical to the future of our practices and profession. Legislators need the input from the physicians providing the care to patients who are directly affected by the public policies they enact. This article outlines specific valuable resources, coalitions, advocacy groups, and professional societies that help gastroenterologists become more effective political advocates.