Taking Legislative Action: How, Why, and Why Now?

By Holly Glover, MSEd, MPAS, MBA, PA-C

Over the last three years, the Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants’ (SDPA) Legislative Affairs Committee has worked diligently to create opportunities for members to get involved legislatively on the behalf of patients and for the advancement of the physician assistant (PA) profession. The laws governing a PA’s practice are largely influenced by state legislation, and state law can be influenced by changes nationally. Therefore, participation in both state and national legislation is very important to ensure practice regulations are not restrictive beyond our training and capabilities.

Patients are also affected by national and state policies. An example in recent years is the policy involving insurer copay accumulator programs. The current policy does not allow the value of the pharmaceutical manufacturer cost-sharing assistance programs to be applied to the individual patient’s insurance plan’s deductible, copay, or annual out-of-pocket limits. The Help Ensure Lower Patient (HELP) Copays Act (H.R. 5801) is a bipartisan bill introduced during the 117th Congress seeking to amend Title XXVII of the Public Health Service Act to prohibit insurer copay accumulator programs. This would lower the cost of important drugs to patients and restore the policy that existed prior to a change made by the former Health and Human Services Secretary in 2020.

Clinical practice is affected by policy change as well. In December of 2021, dermatology healthcare providers were prevented from writing a prescription for isotretinoin when FDA-approved modifications to the iPledge Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS) program were instituted. The system was completely unusable for providers and patients, and it caused delayed or interrupted care for patients on isotretinoin. In addition, the Consolidated Appropriations Act (H.R. 2617) in December of 2022 was slated to cut Medicare payments by 4.5% in 2023. These are examples of how advocacy can make a positive difference for patients and providers.

The SDPA has created the Legislative Action Center so that dermatology PAs can use the platform to influence current policies. The Legislative Action Center specifically provides the opportunity for PAs in dermatology who are members of the SDPA to contact their specific state representatives and senators with a preformulated letter in support or opposition of proposed legislation or with preformulated letters concerning current issues that need attention. The software used by the Legislative Action Center is user-friendly and makes the process of sending these preformulated letters very easy.

Participating in advocacy for the profession and on the behalf of our patients is important. First, participation provides an opportunity to inform representatives and senators about the profession. Once our lawmakers have a greater understanding of who a PA is and what they can do, they are better equipped to form new policies or change old policies affecting our profession. Second, participation brings issues to light. Without knowledge of the issues, we cannot expect Congress to represent us and our patients adequately. And, finally, participation breeds a greater passion for the advancement of our profession.

Many healthcare providers do not know how to advocate for their profession from a political perspective. The Legislative Action Center provides an avenue to do so. To participate, SDPA members need to go to our organization’s website, dermpa.org. Under the Advocacy tab, simply click on the Legislative Action headline. The issues are highlighted; and at end of each issue, a “Take Action” option will easily guide each member to send these preformed letters to their respective members of Congress.

So many of the rules and regulations regarding the practice of PAs are dictated by state law. If our profession wants to continue to practice at the top of our training and license, we need to speak up by participating legislatively. The SDPA’s Legislative Affairs Committee aims to provide many opportunities to become active
participants in the legislative process. Our profession needs us all working in our own states, and the Legislative Action Center has tools to support you as you get involved now! 💪

REFERENCES:

Holly Glover, MSEd, MPAS, MBA, PA-C is from Dermatology and Skin Cancer Surgery Center in Waxahachie, Texas. She served as Chair of the SDPA Legislative Affairs Committee since 2019 and was recently appointed Director at Large on the SDPA Board of Directors. Holly continues to serve the committee as a Board Liaison. She is honored to advocate for SDPA constituents and the PA profession at the AAPA national level meetings by addressing Derm PA concerns and advancing Derm PA interests. She believes it is vital for each SDPA member to be informed on the current issues, and equally important that each member has a voice in response to those issues.

Disclosures: Ms. Glover is a consultant for Abbvie, Almirall, Bristol Myers Squibb, Dermavant, Eli Lilly and Co., Galderma, InCyte, LEO Pharma, Pfizer, and Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Ltd.

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