

2009 AAP National Legislative Conference Report

I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to attend the 2009 AAP Legislative Conference. It was an eye-opening experience for me in many ways. I think its greatest value was the new perspective it gave me on what it means to provide health care for children. It took me outside of my daily grind of paperwork, procedures, and individual patient encounters to stop and think about the health care of children as a whole in our nation. I think it was particularly valuable to gain this perspective while still completing my training in Pediatrics because now I will be starting my career “well-armed” in child advocacy issues. I think this will give me and the children I care for an advantage over pediatricians who seek out child advocacy training late in their careers, often times, after having spent years struggling to overcome obstacles to care.

There are several more specific values that I gained from this conference. One is having the opportunity to hear from people who have successfully advocated for children in their careers who provided me with insight about different potential paths I might take to reach that goal. Secondly, I gained new perspective not only about health care delivery in our country and personal opportunities for advocacy, but I also gained new perspective on what other residency programs are doing to provide child advocacy training. I plan to introduce some of these ideas to my chief residents and program director next year.

I also think the conference was valuable for me in that it gave me multiple personal contacts and web addresses that I can refer to in the coming years to continue to stay informed on advocacy issues. The personal contacts I made with staff members of Oklahoma’s congressional leaders gave me confidence to know that I can approach these people one-on-one and that they will listen to me. Similarly, I also feel more comfortable now interacting with other members of the AAP at both the state and national level just because I have gotten to know them better.

The conference was jam-packed with information to absorb. The major things I learned are how ideas/bills become laws in our country—sort of a Civics 101 review-- and the current structure of Medicaid and CHIP. These are things that I think most pediatricians learn by necessity as they navigate their own careers. I still do not know as much as I think most primary care providers know about reimbursement rates, coding, etc but I probably know more than most of my fellow residents will know at the completion of residency training. With the discussions of Medicaid, I gained an appreciation for the vast differences from state to state in how Medicaid and CHIP programs are set up and the effect of that on physician practices and ultimately the health care of children.

I also learned about alternatives for health care delivery i.e. the medical home model, the Massachusetts plan, MediKids, and the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) and the pros and cons of each of these options. I developed new realization of the unique health care needs of children as compared to adults, which are essential to be recognized in successful formulation of health care reform. Along with that realization, I was struck by children’s extraordinary need for advocacy as compared to the geriatric population, disabled population, etc given the fact that their numbers are rather small and more importantly, the fact that they cannot speak up for themselves.

Some other specific things that I learned through the conference workshops were what a coalition is, how to form one, and how it can help you accomplish your goals. I also learned some negotiation skills in the negotiation workshop. My favorite, most eye-opening workshop was the one on Congressional Insight where we got to see the numerous ways in which legislators are pulled in a million different directions on any given day. This helped me to have a different perspective and thus a somewhat different approach when I met with the congressional staff members.

Given all of the things that I learned and the overwhelmingly positive experience I had, I would definitely recommend that the Oklahoma chapter continue to sponsor a resident to attend the conference. If it all possible, I think it would be even more beneficial if two residents could be sent or if a resident could go with another chapter member, so that they could work together when they returned home and hold each other accountable for continuing their efforts.

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