Washington Consult

ASCO's Advocacy Updates

Throughout 2007, Washington Consult has offered information on what advocacy entails, identified the major players in various committees, and provided words of wisdom from cancer advocates across the country. But how do you know what issues require advocacy efforts?

One of the best ways to be an effective advocate is to be an informed advocate, and the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) offers several tools to help its members stay on top of what is happening on Capitol Hill and around the country.

Cancer Policy Today

Cancer Policy Today is a biweekly series of communications for ASCO members and others in the oncology community. These updates keep readers informed about ASCO's regulatory and legislative efforts and future advocacy efforts related to cancer research, quality care, and Medicare. *Cancer Policy Today* updates are distributed via e-mail, but they are also housed on a publicly accessible page at ASCO.org in the Legislative & Regulatory section: www.asco.org/cancerpolicynews.

In May 2007, for example, *Cancer Policy Today* informed ASCO members about the organization's position on Medicare coverage of clinical trials, including a link to a letter ASCO sent to US Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach, MD, urging him to contact the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) about its decision to eliminate investigational new drug-exempt trial coverage. Also included was a direct link to the CMS Web site so members could submit their own comments.

Another update in the same issue of *Cancer Policy Today* encouraged ASCO members to contact their senators and urge them to sign letters supporting funding increases for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). The update also reported on supportive actions already taken by Members of Congress in the House and Senate on this important issue, and provided a link to ASCO's Grassroots Action Center (<http://capwiz.com/asco>) with additional information.

When readers click on the Grassroots Action Center link, they are taken to a page on ASCO.org containing tools for finding your elected officials' contact information, links to summaries of current legislation and results of recent votes, and a media directory. The same page also offers links to the current House and Senate committee schedules so you know exactly what is happening and when.

Cancer Policy Alerts

Cancer Policy Alerts notifies subscribers about breaking news in the arena of oncology care and research and Medicare issues as the information becomes available so readers can be abreast of the most current happenings. Like *Cancer Policy Today*, *Cancer Policy Alerts* are distributed via e-mail and can also be accessed online in ASCO.org's Legislative & Regulatory section: www.asco.org/cancerpolicynews.

One example of the usefulness of alerts containing breaking news is the March 2007 alert on Medicare coverage policy changes for darbepoetin alfa and epoetin alfa when used for the treatment of the anemia of cancer. The alert contained links to ASCO guidelines and critical information for oncologists. A follow-up alert 4 days later gave further information, addressing frequently asked questions after the initial announcement and providing a link to a summary of related activity by carrier.

Capitol Hill Basics: Committees

Understanding how Congress works and who has jurisdiction over health care matters at the committee level are integral components to becoming informed advocates for quality cancer care. In the Advocacy Tools section of Legislative & Regulatory, ASCO.org provides background details and up-to-date rosters for the six key committees with jurisdiction over areas that affect the oncology community:

- In the Senate: Appropriations Committee, Finance Committee, and Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee;
- In the House: Appropriations Committee, Energy and Commerce Committee, and Ways and Means Committee.

Capitol Hill Basics: Making Contact

In addition to notifying the cancer community about issues that require its attention, and providing contact information for the appropriate representative, ASCO also provides advice on communicating successfully with elected officials and offers nine tips for writing to public officials:

- Be brief
- Avoid using form letters/emails
- Personalize your position
- Identify yourself and your organization
- State the purpose of the letter at the outset
- Know your Member of Congress
- Be polite and respectful
- Send a copy of your letter to ASCO
- Follow-up and be patient

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