

# Resident Involvement in Policy-Making

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*Politics greatly affect how physicians practice medicine. As dermatology residents, it is vital that we familiarize ourselves with the role of the American Academy of Dermatology Association in policy-making as well as opportunities for residents to help shape the future of our specialty.*

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As dermatology residents, we hear rumblings of the political aspects of medicine on the news, at conferences, or from our attending physicians. Most of us conveniently ignore them until after we graduate; however, once we start practicing, we may be shocked to discover just how much politics affect the practice of medicine. In this article, the role of the American Academy of Dermatology Association (AADA) in policy-making is discussed as well as some ways residents can be involved in the process and emphasize just how vital our participation is, even this early on in our careers.

## Role of the AADA in Policy-Making

The AADA advocates on behalf of its members and dermatology patients with the US Congress, state legislatures, and regulatory agencies on issues of concern to the specialty and offers members several opportunities to become involved in advocacy at the state, national, and grassroots levels.<sup>1</sup> The AAD provides several sources of information

on the Web, including the Dermatology Advocacy Network (<http://www.aad-dan.com/>), which includes information on how to contact your member of Congress through the AADA; updates on activities and topics discussed at the AADA Legislative Conference (<https://www.aad.org/meetings/legislative-conference>) and information on how to participate in future conferences; resources on getting involved in advocacy at the grassroots level (<https://www.aad.org/members/practice-and-advocacy/get-involved/grassroots-advocacy>); and information on how to become involved with SkinPAC (<https://www.skinpac.org/>), the AADA's political action committee (PAC). A PAC is organized for the purpose of advancing a particular legislative agenda, whatever the issue may be. SkinPAC ensures that the concerns of dermatologists and their patients are heard on Capitol Hill.

## Opportunities for Resident Involvement

There are several ways residents can be involved in policy-making, including (1) attending the annual AADA Legislative Conference, which offers participants a unique opportunity to attend advocacy training sessions taught by health policy experts, discuss dermatology issues with colleagues, and become trusted and influential voices that members of Congress can rely on,<sup>1</sup> (2) sending a letter to your state or federal officials through the AADA Dermatology Advocacy Network, (3) becoming a state advocacy leader, especially through your state's PAC, and (4) reading the AAD's bi-weekly Dermatology Advocate e-newsletter (<https://www.aad.org/members/publications/dermatology-advocate>), which includes information on congressional actions, federal agency and administration activities, state-level legislative and regulatory news, actions by private payers, and the AADA's active engagement in these arenas. Also featured in the Dermatology

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Advocate e-newsletter is news and information about how members can get involved in advocacy efforts by the AADA and SkinPAC.

### **AADA Legislative Conference**

The 2015 AADA Legislative Conference took place in September in Washington, DC. This conference offers a unique opportunity for residents to learn how federal legislation will impact the future of dermatology. The AADA awards several scholarships to residents who commit to one year of involvement in AADA grassroots advocacy.<sup>2</sup> The AADA covers all expenses to attend the conference for each scholarship recipient, and residents are not required to have any political knowledge or experience in order to attend the conference or receive a scholarship. Advocacy training, which is offered by a panel of health policy experts, covers all aspects of the legislative process as well as information about the legislators themselves.

In addition to the opportunities to get involved on a national level through the AADA, most states also have their own PACs with which physicians can work on grassroots-level issues, such as advocating for state laws prohibiting minors under 18 years of age from using indoor tanning beds, or larger issues including the Medicare sustainable growth rate or global period codes. Additionally, some subspecialties also have their own advocacy groups, including the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association's State-based Advocacy Network for Dermatology Surgery (<http://asdsa.asds.net/ResidentStateAdvocacy.aspx>).

### **The Importance and Influence of Involvement in Policy-Making**

It has been shown that many residents are in fact interested in joining PACs that are relevant to their specialty after learning about the roles these committees play in policy-making but that time constraints and obligations of residency often interfere with their participation.<sup>3</sup> As residents, involvement by our attending physicians plays a huge role. A recent study showed more resident involvement when faculty members set an example of civic involvement and PAC support.<sup>3</sup>

I was inspired to write this column by my residency program's impressive involvement with SkinPAC last year as well as my own personal

experience being an active advocate. During medical school, I helped testify for the Texas State Senate Committee on Health and Human Services in Austin about the risks of indoor tanning and witnessed the eventual ban on indoor tanning use by minors in the state of Texas, which came as a direct result of our advocacy and push for change. I used the University of Texas Medical Branch Dermatology Interest blog (of which I was the Editor during medical school) to help educate others on this issue, lay down the facts to be discussed in an organized and powerful way, and provide contact information for state legislators (<http://digitmb.blogspot.com/2013/05/act-now-tell-governor-perry-to-support.html>).

### **Final Thoughts**

As dermatology residents, a substantial amount of what we do in the routine care of our patients is influenced by policy decisions made by legislators at the state and federal levels, who often do not understand the impact their decisions have on our ability to effectively practice medicine. Learning about these issues now and becoming involved in efforts to affect change is something every resident can do, so get active!

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