

11/27/17 Advocacy Update

The Health and Public Policy Committee (HPPC) has close to 40 members with a wide range of interests and professional experiences spanning from medical students to attendings in practice for over 20 years. HPPC has an active agenda for 2017-2018 with three subcommittees. See below for an overview of the work of each subcommittee.

1. Prescription drug costs

In 2016 and 2017, the MA Chapter testified at the State Senate in support of [S. 652 An Act to promote transparency and prevent price gouging of pharmaceutical drug prices](#), sponsored by Senator Mark Montigny. The bill requires detailed reporting for the ten most expensive drugs in Massachusetts and drugs that have seen significant price hikes (>50% hike within the past five years or >15% within the past year). Information collected would include the actual cost of drug production, the R&D costs for individual drugs, advertising costs, lobbying expenses, prices for foreign purchasers, and profit margins for each drug. In addition, the bill empowers the attorney general to use this information to file lawsuits and designate drugs as having “excessively higher than justified” cost.

[Boston Herald article July 12, 2017 on MA Chapter Testimony](#)

[State House News Service article July 11, 2017 on Hearing for S. 652](#)

Since the July 2017 testimony, HPPC has been working closely with Senator Montigny’s office to garner support for S. 652. In mid-October 2017, HPPC members met with the offices of Senator Jim Welch and Senate President Stan Rosenberg to discuss provisions on prescription drug cost transparency outlined in the Senate’s comprehensive bill to address rising health care costs, [S. 2202 An Act furthering health empowerment and affordability by leveraging transformative health care](#). While this bill asked the pharmaceutical manufacturers to report “net expenditures” on certain drugs and “aggregate, company-level research and development expenditures,” we did not feel that it went far enough to create prescription drug cost transparency.



Meeting with Mike Cannella (Policy Advisor for Senator Jim Welch). Left to right: Zoe Tseng, Elisa Choi, Mike Cannella, Hayaan Kamran, Ammu Susheela, Fatima Cody Stanford, Jeremy Feng.

HPPC wrote an [op-ed](#) voicing these concerns and asking the Senate to strengthen the language in this bill, which was published on KevinMD.com on November 9, 2017.

In response to the weak provisions in S. 2202, Senator Montigny's office submitted amendment #19, which strengthened the data reporting criteria, increased penalties for failure to report, required drug manufacturing companies of excessively priced drugs to develop and implement a prescription drug improvement plan, and authorized the Attorney General to deem excessive drug pricing that fails to

conform to the prescription drug improvement plan as “unfair practice.” Specifically, this amendment would require reporting of the cost of drug production, research and developments costs (including those paid with public funds), marketing and advertising costs, prices charged to purchasers outside the U.S., and annual profit margins.

On November 7, 2017, HPPC organized an advocacy campaign across the Chapter asking our members to contact State Senators to support amendment #19 and provided email template and phone script to facilitate this. The Chapter also released a [statement of support](#) for amendment #19, which was distributed to Senate offices. On November 9, 2017, amendment #19 was adopted with changes but retains the stronger language on transparent drug costs and the fines for failure to comply. It focuses on the Attorney General’s power to hold the companies accountable without the drug companies needing to devise a drug improvement plan.

[MA Chapter advocacy campaign](#)

[Press coverage on amendment #19 approval](#)

S. 2202 with amendments goes on to the State House of Representatives for consideration where it will likely face obstacles. HPPC will continue to work with Senator Montigny and others on pushing forward strong legislation to improve prescription drug cost transparency.

2. Opioid use disorder

This subcommittee has considered various avenues of advocacy including supporting state legislation for Safe Injection Facility (SIF), which is in preliminary stages. HPPC would like to provide more education to members about opioid use disorder treatment resources, including how to apply for waivers to prescribe suboxone, through an educational event in the future. Additionally, HPPC is looking for ways to support [legislation](#) recently passed by the State Senate requiring the Department of Corrections and county sheriffs to evaluate all inmates for drug dependency and provide FDA approved medication assisted treatment for addiction to all inmates and require inmates who are currently prescribed these medications before incarceration to continue their addiction treatment.

3. State House Advocacy Day

The third annual State House Advocacy Day will be held on Wednesday, April 4, 2018 at the State House. It will consist of morning sessions during which participants will hear from state legislators and receive training by advocacy and policy experts at Massachusetts Medical Society. In the afternoon, participants will visit the offices of their state legislators to discuss several important pieces of legislation. One of the goals of this event is for our members to build long-term relationships with state legislators to further the advocacy work of our Chapter.