

## ACP's 2021 Advocacy Goes "Virtual!"

The COVID-19 pandemic did not stop ACP members from meeting with their congressional members virtually over two days on May 25-26, 2021. More than 400 ACP members – including medical students, Resident/Fellows-in-training, members of the College's Board of Regents and Board of Governors – from all 50 states and the District of Columbia participated in this year's "Virtual" Leadership Day. It was a fantastic turn out for our first-ever virtual advocacy event.

In addition to meeting with legislators and their staff via Zoom, participants were provided with briefings from members of Congress and ACP staff on the College's



priority issues, which included:

### Expanding health coverage and affordability

Congress should pass legislation to expand access to health coverage and make it more affordable by supporting policies that

would continue expanded eligibility for higher premium tax credits to purchase coverage through the Affordable Care Act and provide higher federal payments for states to expand their Medicaid population.

### Training and supporting frontline physicians during and after COVID-19

Congress should pass legislation to ensure an adequate supply of internal medicine specialists trained in primary and comprehensive care that includes increasing Graduate Medical Education positions, addressing medical education debt, decreasing barriers to increase the number of international physicians in the United States, funding Title VII Health Professions grants and addressing the behavioral health and well-being of physicians.

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## Save the Date: Leadership Day 2022 – May 17-18! Mandarin Oriental, Washington, DC

As we look to 2022, we are making plans for an in-person event at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Washington, DC on May 17-18 for Leadership Day 2022. Please mark your calendars so you can join us!

Leadership Day enables the College to increase its presence on Capitol Hill and bring our issues of concern to U.S. lawmakers. ACP members will receive two days of in-depth briefings on the College's legislative priorities and an oppor-

tunity to meet with elected officials.

Due to continued COVID-19 concerns and because the safety of our attendees is important to us, we will continue to closely monitor and adhere to CDC and local guidelines as we plan this event.

If you have questions regarding Leadership Day, please contact Shuan Tomlinson at [stomlinson@acponline.org](mailto:stomlinson@acponline.org) or 800-338-2746, ext. 4547.

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### Supporting the value of primary and comprehensive care

Congress should pass legislation to ensure patients continue to have access to vital primary care services by stabilizing and improving payments for undervalued office-based visits under both Medicare and Medicaid, providing sufficient funding to prevent scheduled and future cuts in payments and maintaining incentives for physicians to transform their practices into Advanced Alternative Payment Models under the Medicare Quality Payment Program.

### Improving access to pre-

### scription drugs and reducing costs

Congress should pass legislation to improve access to prescription drugs by reducing excessive prescription drug costs through pricing transparency, providing authority to the federal government to negotiate prescription drug prices under the Medicare Part D program, eliminating federal tax deductions for direct-to-consumer advertising and removing harmful step therapy protocols.

### Supporting essential public health and research initiatives

Congress should pass legislation to fund public health, medical and health services research initiatives. Congress

should adopt a public health approach to reduce firearms-related injuries and deaths that includes dedicated funding for firearms violence prevention research, strengthening the criminal background check system, closing loopholes that allow domestic violence offenders to acquire firearms and promoting state adoption of extreme risk protection laws. Congress should pass legislation to mitigate the harmful effects of climate change on health.

### Promoting health equity and social justice and eliminate disparities

Congress should pass legislation to promote health equity and social justice and eliminate racial/gender disparities in health care. Most importantly, they

should advance policies to reduce discriminatory practices in law enforcement, bar discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, collect racial and ethnic data on health disparities and reduce pregnancy-related deaths among minorities and other underserved women.

### Expanding access to telehealth services and promoting patient safety/privacy

Congress should pass legislation to increase the flexibility and use of telehealth services as needed during and beyond the public health emergency because these services will continue to be vital to patient care.

## Advocacy in Action: by Stephen D. Sisson, MD, FACP, President, ACP Services, Inc.



**Stephen Sisson, MD, FACP, President, ACP Services, Inc.**

As an honors graduate of *Schoolhouse Rock*, brought on by watching perhaps too many Saturday morning cartoons, I knew since childhood how a bill became a law. The image of that sad bill, sitting on the Capitol steps hoping to become a law, is etched permanently in my mind's eye. And the song, a simple little jingle, alternating between major and minor keys,

is still playing in the background.

When I became an ACP Governor (Maryland; Class of 2018), I admit I did not understand all of the ways that the College advocates for our patients and our physicians. Sure, I knew that Congress called on the College for advice on weighty decisions. I also knew that the College published meaningful position papers on key healthcare issues. But there is so much more that the College does to put advocacy in action, and it's more than can be captured in a simple *Schoolhouse Rock* jingle.

Of all the outstanding advocacy work that the ACP does, perhaps my favorite is how grassroots advocacy can trans-

late into congressional action, and how valuable Leadership Day is in making that happen. In my time as Governor, I saw an idea form at the grassroots level. That idea was tossed around by the chapter, and then turned into a resolution. That resolution then worked its way through the Board of Governors, getting refined and improved through feedback from those in favor and from those opposed, before it was ultimately passed. The following year, that resolution, that started as an idea shared by a few College members, was one of the key advocacy positions we shared with members of Congress on Leadership Day. That connection between grassroots advocacy and College advocacy with Congress is something about which the College is rightfully proud.

And that brings us to Leadership Day. Leadership Day is more than simply a day. Rather, it's the culmination of countless hours of consideration and planning; countless hours of meetings and conversations. Leadership Day is ACP Services' finest moment: the chance to put advocacy into action by engaging our very own members in conversations with the staff of those representing us in Congress, and with the lawmakers themselves. Leadership Day is that rare opportunity for our members to be part of the inner workings of Congress.

The operational challenges of making Leadership Day happen underwent a paradigm shift in 2021 as we navigated advocacy in the pandemic era. What resulted, thanks to outstanding work by ACP Services' staff,

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## Advocacy in Action: by Stephen D. Sisson, MD, FACP, President, ACP Services, Inc.

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was a new type of Leadership Day. Of course, everything had to move to Zoom, but anyone who feared that would diminish the effectiveness of our work was quickly proven wrong. Unburdened by the need to travel, chapters fielded robust teams of advocates who attended a

synchronized series of online meetings with congressional members or staff. There were over 370 Zoom meetings held with congressional members or staff on Leadership Day, with hundreds of meaningful conversations on issues that matter to our patients and our physicians. I was part of the Maryland delegation, and we had 10 back-to-back Zooms

with the Maryland Congressional delegation. As the day progressed, we met up with several familiar faces that we knew from years past. With no need to zip from one office to another on Capitol Hill, we actually met with more of the Maryland Congressional delegation than in other years. Physical separation did not diminish our effectiveness; we

were heard that day.

The ways that ACP puts advocacy into action is more than a jingle; it's more than a song; it's a symphony. Leadership Day is when all of those different instruments of ACP advocacy come together to make a joyful noise.

## Presentation of the 2021 Richard Neubauer Advocacy for Internal Medicine Award

The 2021 Richard Neubauer Advocate for Internal Medicine Award was presented at this year's virtual Leadership Day to Dr. Amy L. Davis (Bryn Mawr, PA) for her outstanding contributions to advance the College's public policy agenda. The Richard Neubauer Award for Internal Medicine is presented each year during Leadership Day to recognize individuals who have made exceptional efforts in support of the College's advocacy program.

Dr. Davis has been an active member of the College and has a history of inspired engagement with advocacy on behalf of patients and the profession. As chair of the Pennsylvania Chapter's

Health and Public Policy Committee, Dr. Davis has directed the chapter's efforts in developing materials to support national policies with localized information to demonstrate impacts on constituents. She has served as a delegate to Leadership Day since 2014, and has co-chaired the delegation since 2018. She has met personally with almost half of the state's Congressional delegation, both in Washington, D.C. and at home in their district offices. She has drafted op-ed pieces for key legislation and has personally recruited members for the Advocates for Internal Medicine Network (AIMn) in all three regions of the state.

At the state level, she has been responsible for the development of state level policies on more than a dozen successful legislative efforts. She personally developed relationships with her own State Senator and State Representative at the local level and served as the PA Chapter's spokesperson in public media events in the Capitol on issues ranging from health insurance to utilization review. She traveled to Harrisburg and met with the Chairs of the Professional Licensure Committee, Health and Human Services Committees, and the Insurance Committee. During the past legislative session, she helped identify and secure cosponsors for legislation to reform prior authorization processes in

Pennsylvania and participated in legislative negotiations to develop a pilot project for nurse practitioners serving in Health Professional Shortage Areas, which was turned into legislation that passed the state House. She also provided leadership on behalf of the state medical community on no less than five different bills impacting the use and prescribing of opioids, suboxone, and fentanyl. She has also drafted amendments that were successfully passed as part of legislation providing relief to physicians prescribing medically-assisted treatments (MATs) for opioid use, and she has become a resource on issues related to both MATs and palliative care.

## 2021 Evergreen Awards in Advocacy: A Salute to the New York and Oregon Chapters!

The John Tooker Evergreen Awards Program provides recognition and visibility to chapters that have successfully implemented programs to increase membership and member engagement, improve communication and chapter management, enhance diversity, and foster careers in Internal Medicine.

Two chapters have received

2021 John Tooker Evergreen Awards in the area of advocacy. The two chapters were New York and Oregon.

### **The New York Chapter: 2020 Virtual Telehealth Advocacy Day**

The New York Chapter received the Evergreen Award for its 2020 Virtual Telehealth Advocacy Day, which was

held on June 19, 2020.

Through a new collaboration between the Chapter's Health and Public Policy, Health Information Technology, and Quality and Patient Safety Committees, material was developed quickly to demonstrate the importance of telehealth in maintaining high-quality care for New York's residents, and aspects of implementation that are critical components for

reaching diverse patient populations, including audio-only interaction. On the day of the chapter's virtual event, participants met in the morning via Zoom for a briefing to discuss messaging, talking points and leave behind materials. Following the briefing, all participants contacted their individual New

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York State Senate and Assembly representatives to discuss telehealth, and designated Chapter representatives met with the Chair of the New York State Senate and Assembly Health Committees and the NY State Department of Health. Numerous follow-up meetings occurred after this event, including with legislative, state and executive agency personnel regarding telehealth matters, thereby demonstrating the impact of the event on NYACP's involvement in policy development of state-based telehealth guidance.

### **The Oregon Chapter: Growing Advocacy in the State in 2020**

The Oregon Chapter received the Evergreen Award for its efforts in "Growing Advocacy in Oregon," which offers opportunities for health care professionals to learn how to engage in advocacy efforts benefiting patients and the internal medicine profession. At the center of the effort to grow advocacy in Oregon is their new annual chapter advocacy day at the state house with the goal of increasing their visibility with lawmakers and increasing their influence on health policy matters affecting Oregonians. The advocacy day provide an opportuni-



Members of the Oregon Chapter, Advocacy Day 2020

ty to increase recruitment and engagement. This was the chapter's first Advocacy Day, which took place on February 27, 2020. The event offered a variety of training sessions geared towards learning skills for advocacy efforts, education about ACP policy, and scheduled appointments with state legislators. This event and related activities help members understand local and national ACP policy and legislative priorities and learn about the benefits of belonging to AIMn and how to communicate and engage with legislators outside of the state legislative session.

The early planning stages of the event, included creating

"branding" to be carried through on all of their communications; developing a logo/graphic to be used on all communications and advertising pieces; making concerted outreach efforts in two ways - to areas outside of Portland/Metro, for inclusiveness of attendees from all demographics in Oregon, and to their five Internal Medicine Residency training programs in Oregon; identifying key people in eastern and southern Oregon - asking them to help promote the event in their respective areas and/or join their committee work; and making direct contact with Program Directors and

Chief Residents at the five Internal Medicine Residency training programs - encouraging their participation in committee work and attending the event.

A small group of participants came together after the event and initiated a plan for Chapter support for Measure 110, the Drug Decriminalization and Addiction Treatment Initiative (2020), which was on the Oregon State November, 2020 ballot and passed by OR voters.