

## 2011 ASA Legislative Conference Synopsis

The 2011 ASA Legislative Conference was held in Washington, D.C. from May 2 through May 4. Representing WSSA were Drs. Daniela Alexianu, Aparna Ananth, James Burkman, Kendra Buschetta, Peter Dunbar, Sean Kincaid, Vita Pliskow, and James Stangl. Attendance for this year's conference was the largest in its 33-year history, with over 500 anesthesiologists participating! A record-breaking 92 resident physicians also attended, including WSSA's own Dr. Buschetta, adding their voices and perspectives on issues critical to our specialty.

Participants heard from a bipartisan mix of elected officials, including Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA), and Rep. Xavier Becerra (D-CA). Andy Harris (R-MD), the first anesthesiologist ever elected to Congress, addressed the conference on health care reform and the federal deficit. Additionally, Jonathan Blum, the director of the Center for Medicare under the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), addressed the conference. In keeping with this year's theme of "All Politics is Local," there were over three hours of presentations on state issues including a state issues forum, and a presentation by Dr. Richard Rosenquist on pain management issues, including a discussion of our state's new opioid prescribing regulations.

ASA members learned about our society's top legislative priorities and how to effectively advocate for our specialty to our elected representatives. Key issues that your WSSA representatives discussed with our state's legislators included:

- *Medicare Anesthesia Payments:* Given that anesthesiologists are paid by Medicare at 33% of private payor rates, and that our specialty is not driving volume or spending growth under Medicare, ASA is advocating that our Medicare payments need to be "held harmless" from any potential SGR cuts. In addition, ASA along with many other medical specialty societies is supporting legislation that repeals the Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) created under last year's Affordable Care Act. This unelected, largely unaccountable board would have broad powers to mandate substantial payment cuts *on top of* SGR cuts.
- *Expanding Rural Anesthesiologist Access:* Medicare already permits more generous Part A funding for non-MD anesthesia providers through a "pass-through" arrangement with small hospitals. ASA supports H.R. 1044, which would extend these pass-through funds to anesthesiologists serving in rural areas.
- *Truth and Transparency:* Non-physician providers are increasingly presenting themselves as equivalent to MDs in hospital settings (the prime example being "doctors of nursing"). ASA strongly supports the bipartisan "Health Care Truth and Transparency Act," which would mandate accurate information about various providers credentials and ensure clarity in provider-related advertising and marketing.
- *Easing Drug Shortages:* Recent surveys show that upwards of 90% of anesthesiologists have been affected by drug shortages, and that these shortages are negatively affecting quality of care. As a first step to addressing this complex problem, ASA supports passage of S. 296, the

“Preserving Access to Life-Saving Medications Act,” which would help ramp up congressional and regulatory scrutiny of drug shortages.

After two very full days of presentations and briefings, your WSSA representatives went to Capitol Hill and met with Senator Maria Cantwell, Representatives Dave Reichert and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, and legislative aides for Senator Patty Murray and Reps. Norm Dicks, Adam Smith, Jay Inslee, Jamie Herrera Beutler, and Doc Hastings. We also had the opportunity to meet and talk with Senator Murray at a constituents’ coffee before our “office rounds.” It was a very full but positive and productive day! Even with deficit spending and the increasing federal debt overshadowing most other business on Capitol Hill, our senators and representatives from both sides of the aisle were interested and receptive to our specialty’s concerns, including ASA’s deep concern with IPAB. A large measure of credit for getting ASA’s message across goes to the efforts of our society’s advocacy team in Washington, D.C. Your continued strong support for ASAPAC and fielding our state’s team to go to the D.C. Legislative Conference does pay off!

Many thanks for your continued support of ASA and WSSA!

James Stangl, MD  
President, WSSA