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Advocacy: Essential to the growth of the PA profession

It's late November, and I have just typed *health* into Thomas, the legislative search engine for the Library of Congress. In a matter of seconds, more than 1,000 hits appear, identifying the bills and resolutions on health care that have been introduced thus far in the 111th Congress. The overwhelming majority of these bills will not be addressed by this Congress. Twelve of the bills specifically mention physician assistants.

So how does the AAPA elevate the role of physician assistants in this competitive environment? How do we bring attention to the need to change existing law to allow PAs to provide hospice care, for example, when the public discussion on health care reform centers on mega political issues like financing and the role of government? The answer is **advocacy and you**. Simply put, the success of AAPA's advocacy efforts requires the active engagement of all of our members. Advocacy for the PA profession includes the work of the Academy's lobbyists, communications and media messaging, and the active involvement of AAPA leadership. However, all of these efforts register little attention and action without sustained and focused outreach to members of Congress by individual PAs.

Legislative success depends on the Academy's ability to demonstrate that it represents the views of a significant number of legislators' constituents. That can't be done without ongoing communication from PAs to their elected Representatives and Senators urging support for reform measures that remove barriers to PAs providing care and expand utilization of PAs across the health care spectrum.

Remember last spring, when the White House did not acknowledge the role of PAs in health care reform? After receiving more than 7,000 emails from PAs across the country, the AAPA message began to resonate with the White House. The White House began to invite PAs to attend regional White House Forums, and the White House Office of Health Reform initiated a forum on primary care, inviting AAPA leaders to participate.

We know that advocacy works. Your efforts worked with the White House, and they have worked with Congress. And there are ample opportunities for you to continue those efforts, one in particular coming up in February that you can link to at the end of these comments.

Health care reform bills in both the House and Senate address PA education, eliminate barriers to care provided by PAs, and integrate PAs into new medical home and chronic care management models. Unfortunately, the bill

debated by the Senate dropped the provision to allow PAs to provide hospice care under Medicare because of a concern regarding cost. What must be our response? Increased advocacy! Legislators need to hear from physician assistants in their states that it is imperative to remove this barrier to care—particularly for Medicare beneficiaries in medically underserved communities. If legislators don't hear from us, they'll think the status quo is okay.

AAPA's membership is a lot like the American public. We have members on the right and members on the left of the political spectrum, and a lot of members in the center. Cognizant of our members' diverse views, we have not

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endorsed any of the health care reform bills under consideration. However, we continue to advance AAPA's principles on health care, and we continue to work to ensure that each of these bills includes positive PA provisions.

We've done well, but we can do better. I urge you to help build the PA profession's advocacy efforts and influence on Capitol Hill to a higher level. I encourage you to increase your efforts to

- Use the Capitol Hill online and telephone hotline resources to regularly contact your legislators at <http://capwiz.com/aapa/home/>
- Energize your PA colleagues and engage legislators at home by making use of our online grassroots toolkit at www.aapa.org/advocacy-and-practice-resources/federal-advocacy/advocacy-tips-and-tools
- Invest in the PA profession by making a generous contribution to the AAPA Political Action Committee
- Make plans to attend the AAPA Capitol Connection February 22-23, 2010, and visit your legislators on Capitol Hill with fellow PAs. See www.aapa.org/upcoming-events/capitol-connection for more information.

I propose a New Year's Resolution for the PA profession. Let's make 2010 the year of the PA on Capitol Hill. Together, we can advance the PA profession. Let's do it! **JAAPA**