

TIPS FOR HOSTING AN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISIT

Newly elected and veteran members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly alike rely heavily upon input from their constituents. Whether your legislator is a freshman representative or a seasoned senator with years of legislative experience, he or she wants to hear what you, as a constituent and a physician, have to say about issues of importance to the community.

As the front-line of our nation's health care delivery system, emergency physicians are well positioned to educate legislators on a wide-range of issues including patient access, public health concerns, rural and inner-city health issues, and quality of care.

The goal of the "Visit your ED" project is to educate your legislator about our specialty. Your legislator will see first-hand the inner workings of a hospital emergency department and the care you provide -- seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. Through this program, the Chapter hopes that you will get to know your legislators on a more personal level, so they will turn to you when they need advice or more information about issues related to emergency medicine.

The PaACEP Legislative Committee developed these "Tips for Hosting an Emergency Department Visit" to help you successfully conduct a "Visit your ED" program.

SCHEDULING THE VISIT

- 1) Contact our lobbyist, John Milliron (717-232-5322) or John@millironassociates.com who will help you prepare for and conduct the visit.
- 2) Discuss the visit with the hospital administration and the hospital's public relations department of the visit. Be prepared to discuss the advantages for the hospital as well as for yourself, your patients and the community. Once the visit date is set, you may also want to inform hospital security of the visit.
- 3) Contact your legislator or his/her scheduler at either the Harrisburg or district office. Identify yourself as a constituent and emergency physician. Also mention where you practice.
- 4) Extend the invitation to the legislator and any staff members who may be interested. Provide several dates when you would be available to host the visit.
- 5) Follow-up the phone call with a written invitation confirming the date and time, if one has been set. Don't be discouraged if it takes several invitations before he or she accepts.
- 6) You may want to include a confidentiality agreement with your letter that should be signed in advance by all parties planning to participate in the visit. Because of concerns with liability, confidentiality issues are important to the hospital, physicians and patients.

PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

- 1) Do your homework. If this is your first meeting with the legislator, it's a good idea to learn more about his/her key issues, voting patterns, committee assignments and general interests. John Milliron can provide you with this information.
- 2) For this get-acquainted visit, prepare an overview about the specialty and the care you provide. David Blunk, the chapter's executive director (877-373-6272, or 717-558-7750) can provide the chapter's position on the issues of the day. Chapter lobbyist, John Milliron (717-232-5322) can provide background information regarding the legislator.
- 3) Determine before the visit whether the legislator will be informing the local media of the visit or inviting them to cover the event. You may want to have a photographer on hand where appropriate. Photographs as well as news releases can provide information for local papers and for the PaACEP newsletter.
- 4) Inform the other members of the emergency department staff of the visit and its purpose. Be prepared to provide them with background information on the legislator and issues that could be discussed.
- 5) Develop a schedule that allows enough time to tour the facility and to enjoy informal discussions.
- 6) Prepare or provide a fact sheet for the legislator with relevant local statistics such as the number of patient visits, number of staff, reasons for visits, etc.
- 7) If the legislator's schedule permits, plan an informal luncheon or reception following the visit. If not, follow the visit with a short private discussion in a quiet office or lounge area.

THE VISIT

- 1) Have the legislator report directly to the ED at the agreed-upon time. A visit can be arranged at any time of the day or night, depending on the legislator's schedule, but busy ED times are preferable.
- 2) Provide the legislator and his staff with lab coats and identifying name tags if possible.
- 3) Decide whether you want the legislator to follow you as you work your shift, or you act as a host while patient care is handled by other staff physicians.
- 4) The physician should introduce the legislator to each patient who is to be evaluated. Ask the patient's permission for the legislator to observe the evaluation and treatment. The legislator will need to leave the examining room if the patient so chooses. Obviously, legislators should not be present during any part of the physical examination that may be embarrassing to the patient (such as genital examinations), during questioning or counseling of a sensitive or private nature, or if the legislator is acquainted with the patient.
- 5) Legislators should not be allowed to inspect patient records, but ED documentation and related paperwork (such as transfer forms) can be demonstrated. Thus the legislator will have the opportunity to learn about the paperwork burdens of an emergency practice. Allow legislators to listen to your interactions with the **ED staff**, other physicians, and family members, and explain the significance of these conversations with the legislator.

- 6) You may want to consider having the legislator make the call to the insurance company or HMO for authorization to evaluate and treat the patient. This experience can provide the legislator with valuable insight on the difficulties and delays in receiving authorization to evaluate and treat.
- 7) Brief the legislator on the role of the emergency department in the community. Walk through the reasons why a patient would present at an emergency department (unavailability of primary care physician, uninsured, out-of-town care, accidents, etc.)
- 8) Keep the visit focused while encouraging questions and open discussion. Keep close track of time.
- 9) Try to leave one or two clear messages or impressions with your legislator.

AFTER THE VISIT

- 1) **Follow-up is critical. Send a thank you letter detailing the highlights of the visit.**
- 2) Send any photographs taken during the visit, and copies of any newspaper articles highlighting the visit to your legislator and the Chapter office.
- 3) Relay to the chapter office that the visit took place.
- 4) Keep in regular contact with your legislator. Write letters on issues of concern, attend town hall meetings, and schedule future visits to encourage further communication and to establish yourself as a resource for the legislator.
- 5) Express interest in the legislator's political and legislative activities. Ask to receive the legislator's newsletter. Send a note of thanks when the lawmaker pleases you with a vote on an issue.
- 6) Inform your legislator of your activities and continuing problems. Don't hesitate to state your position on upcoming legislation.

Thank you for participating in this important project.