

An Inside Look at MPA

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The mission of the MPA staff is to be the team of professionals committed to serving our members and the profession of pharmacy. But what does that really mean, and what do the MPA staff members actually do on a daily basis? The answer is complicated, but in an attempt to answer it, each issue of *Michigan Pharmacist* in 2007 will highlight one general function of the association. This new feature, "Inside MPA," will attempt to add more detail and inform members about how MPA staff members spend their days. The first general function that will be described is legislative/regulatory. A description of legislative and regulatory functions, most of which are led by MPA Director of Governmental Affairs Greg Baran and supported by other MPA staff, follows.

Events

Every year, MPA holds several legislative- or PAC-related events to provide a forum for interaction between legislators and other political figures and pharmacy professionals. In addition, funds must be raised to support the goals of Pharmacy PAC. Each of these events requires a large amount of planning to accomplish.

Legislative Day is held each year in May. Coordinating the event requires securing a location and inviting legislators and other individuals to speak. Additionally, the event must be publicized to pharmacy professionals, legislators must be invited to the reception, continuing education credit must be secured and coordinated to make sure all ACPE regulations are met, and details of food and beverages for the reception need to be worked out. Legislative Day is a crucial event for pharmacy, because not only does it help educate pharmacy professionals about current issues, it also provides a forum for networking between colleagues and interaction between legislators and their pharmacy constituents.



Pharmacy Day at the Capitol

Pharmacy Day at the Capitol, which is also held each year, is another important happening. Duties related to Pharmacy Day include securing the Capitol Lawn, renting tables, chairs and the tent itself, obtaining volunteers to work at the event and soliciting donations for supplies to be used. Additionally, food for the attendees and volunteers must be ordered, which is a challenge since the unknown factor is how many individuals will attend. Another significant challenge is determining the appropriate day on which to schedule it. This requires coordination with legislators' schedules, which change quite often, an attempt to avoid being on the same day as other events. Other tasks that are also necessary are publicizing the event to legislators, as well as attempting to engage the media and secure media coverage. As complicated as this event can be, it has huge benefits. In this way, the patient care provided by pharmacists can be showcased to those legislators who may be making decisions that can affect pharmacy. Additionally, the event creates publicity that spreads throughout the community. It's also a valuable experience for the pharmacist and pharmacy student volunteers.

Other important events include PAC fundraisers, such as golf outings or charter fishing outings, Las Vegas Night and the PAC Breakfast during the Annual Convention & Exposition. Some of these fundraisers require more planning than others, but most include securing food and/or beverages and deciding on a location. Las Vegas Night, for instance, involves choosing which types of games to feature, renting equipment and soliciting donations for prizes and volunteers to work at the event. Another complicating factor for Las Vegas Night is the stringent regulations of the lottery board, which involve a large amount of paperwork and ensuring that attendees follow all the rules required. For the PAC Breakfast, speakers must also be secured.

One of the more unique and valuable aspects of the legislative category is the Candidate School. Candidate School is held periodically in collaboration with other healthcare associations to encourage healthcare professionals to run for office. Speakers are recruited to educate these professionals on different facets of the process of running for and holding political office. These speakers offer a much needed perspective to those healthcare professionals considering a candidacy. This event is so important because the experience and background of healthcare professionals is desperately needed in the political arena.

Candidates/Fundraising

In the past year, MPA and its entities and members held 15 fundraising events for political candidates, raising over \$100,000 in the process. These fundraisers were held for members of both the



Senate and House Health Policy Committees and members of the legislative leadership from both parties. MPA receives anywhere from 15 to 20 requests for support per week, from all legislators, both caucuses, leadership, the governor's office, secretary of state, attorney general and all candidates, as well as incumbents—so, basically, from everyone. Typically, MPA/PAC supports healthcare professionals and all incumbents. Money is donated to members of the legislative leadership, members of the House and Senate Health Policy Committees and members of the House and Senate Community Health Appropriations Subcommittees. Additionally, money is donated to those who are healthcare professionals, either by licensure or registration. All of these donations are conducted in a bipartisan fashion.



MPA Director of Governmental Affairs Greg Baran (far left), MPA CEO Larry Wagenknecht (second from right), and Gary Haulmark of the Coalition for Community Pharmacy Action (far right) met with Congressman Mike Rogers to discuss pharmacy issues.

In addition to supporting candidates and legislators financially, MPA/PAC and its members have helped by promoting grassroots efforts, assisting with going door-to-door, staffing phone banks and assisting with mailings. For example, during the last gubernatorial election, groups of Pharmacists for Granholm and Pharmacists for DeVos were organized. MPA staff met with staffers from each of the campaigns, organized mailings and held fundraisers to support the candidates of their choice.

All of this action and fundraising is important because it helps pharmacy to have a political voice. Supporting legislative candidates does not guarantee that any or all votes will be positive for pharmacy, but it does ensure that the legislators will listen to the position of MPA and its members and be willing to meet with MPA staff to discuss issues. This is critical because, in Baran's own words, for most legislators he is "not a constituent but an individual viewed as a 'hired gun'."

Once MPA has the ear of a legislator, appointments are made in which key MPA staff meet with the individual and his or her staff. During these meetings, MPA staff define problems and discuss potential solutions. They lay out the financial implications of the problem and/or proposed solution. Additionally, MPA staff assists with analysis to determine the financial impact on the state. Whenever discussing legislation, MPA staff make clear who the opposition to the legislation is and what the opposition's argument is. In



Pharmacists Franz Neubrecht, Ron Melaragni and Joe Leonard attended a reception for outgoing legislators.

this way, they try to dispel the opposing rationale before the legislator hears the argument from the opposition.

Hearings

Baran attends all hearings for the Senate and House Health Policy Committees. The number of hearings varies, but sometimes they occur as often as weekly or once a month. At these hearings, he provides written or verbal testimony. Baran also is available to answer questions if called upon by legislators. It is at this time that potential opposition to our issues is evaluated, as well as determining what legislation shows movement and what legislators are in favor with legislative leadership. This is critical because it is the senate majority leader or the speaker of the house who determine which committees legislation is referred to and, based upon chairmanship of those committees, whether the legislation will have a hearing or not and when it might be heard. The subject matter of these hearings varies somewhat. Health Policy Committees deal mostly with most issues related to statutes found in the Public Health Code. Appropriations Committee meetings deal with funding, specifically Medicaid reimbursement. Senior Health, Security and Retirement Committee

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Pharmacist Roberta Armstrong testified at a House Health Policy hearing.

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meetings generally involve geriatric care issues that are not referred to the Health Policy committee. MPA staff also attend meetings held by the Insurance Committee and Judiciary Committee if they are reviewing legislation pertinent to the pharmacy profession.

Besides hearings and personal meetings, MPA staff also attend all workgroup sessions for pertinent legislation. Workgroups are generally called by the committee chairman and are an opportunity for all interested parties to offer comments and suggest changes to legislation. Generally, these sessions are held either prior to introduction of legislation or prior to committee hearings. Obviously, research is needed prior to participation in these sessions.

Regulatory Issues

Baran attends each Board of Pharmacy meeting, held every other month. When appropriate, he offers comments and answers questions when asked. Additionally, this provides an opportunity to monitor actions of the Board of Pharmacy and, especially, the Disciplinary Subcommittee to determine what the regulatory bureau is monitoring and for which issues pharmacists are being disciplined. Attending these meetings allows MPA staff to educate members and help them to be prepared when issues arise. Baran also attends the Controlled Substance Advisory Commission meetings, Office of Public Health Preparedness Advisory Committee meetings and Michigan Volunteer Registry Committee meetings to keep the association involved with and abreast of pertinent issues.

Information Gathering/Dispersing

Baran attends the NCPA Annual Legislative Conference and visits each member of Michigan's Congressional delegation in Washington at least once each year. He also participates in conference calls with NCPA, NACDS and ASHP on legislative issues. This allows him to distribute information to the membership of MPA, as well as answers questions asked by members. A common, almost daily, occurrence is

for Baran to respond to questions related to pharmacy law and regulations, both federal and state, such as if controlled substance prescriptions are valid from prescribers located in certain states.

Grassroots Efforts

The two main tools for grassroots efforts continue to be the Pharmacy Response Network and the Legislative Action Center. The Legislative Action Center is a web-based initiative to provide pharmacists, technicians or others with information about legislation pertinent to pharmacists and pharmacy. This website gives a summary of the legislation, talking points and a mechanism to compose letters to legislators or congressional representatives and to submit letters via e-mail or fax. Baran maintains the service for pharmacy professionals by keeping pertinent information on issues and legislation up to date and developing talking points and sample letters for users.

Baran also coordinates the Pharmacist Response Network. The purpose of this entity is to establish a pharmacist, technician or pharmacy employee as constituent contact in each legislative district. This is important because pharmacy causes can benefit from pharmacy professionals' personal relationships with legislators. Participants are recruited via personal invitation during continuing education programs or articles in MPA communications. Baran utilizes e-mail to communicate important issues, and each member of the PRN is expected to contact five other pharmacists in their area, as well as contacting his or her legislator. Contacts are best made via personal calls, meetings, e-mails or faxes. MPA staff supplies the talking points and asks that participants supplement the information with personal examples of how the proposed legislation will impact their patients or business, as needed.

This article isn't an all inclusive description of what MPA, Pharmacy PAC and MPA staff accomplish in the legislative and regulatory arena, but it is hoped that it will give members better conception of the efforts that are being made.