

AARC PACT Takes on Capitol Hill

ASRC PACT representatives John Campbell, Theresa Gramlich and Art Middleton joined over 100 other respiratory therapists from 46 states in Washington DC on March 11 for the AARC Annual Capitol Hill Day. Together these PACT representatives visited more than 300 congressional offices to educate our elected officials about the respiratory care profession and key legislation impacting respiratory patients.

On the first day of our meeting, all the PACT representatives met for a day long series of meetings that updates all members on the issues facing our profession, and lobbying tips before meeting our Congressional delegation. This year, the AARC invited Congressman Mike Ross (D-AR) to speak to the PACT regarding the importance of the Medicare Respiratory Care initiative. Immediately following his speech, Congressman Ross was recognized for his support and leadership from the AARC.



The legislative process is often long and complicated. It takes patience and persistence when advocating for the respiratory patient to have greater access to quality respiratory care provided by a competent respiratory care practitioner. But it is encouraging when the hard work and efforts begin to bring forth positive action. This year, our efforts focused on the Medicare Respiratory Therapy Initiative (HR 3968) which was introduced into the House by Congressman Mike Ross (D-AR) and a companion bill (S. 2704) which was introduced into the Senate by Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID). If passed, this legislation will allow Registered Respiratory Therapists who hold a bachelor's degree to provide services such as smoking cessation, asthma management, and medication device selection and education while under the general supervision of a physician (i.e., without the physician having to be physically present on-site). This legislation will improve the ability of these therapists to deliver these prescribed services in the physician's office and other sites of care.



Another key issue on the ARRC legislative agenda is the Pulmonary and Cardiac Rehabilitation Act (S.329; H.R. 552). If passed, this legislation would create a national coverage policy for outpatient pulmonary rehabilitation. Since its introduction in the Senate last year by Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), this bill has gained significant bi-partisan support in both the House and the Senate (currently over 200 co-sponsors). It is possible that this bill could be attached to a larger Medicare initiative this year. All of the Arkansas congressmen and senators have signed on in support of this bill.



It is no coincidence that these two major pieces of legislation were introduced into the House and Senate by an Arkansas Senator and Congressman. We are indeed very fortunate to have their support for our profession and for the respiratory patient. But a huge amount of credit should be given to the continued efforts of John Campbell, RRT, who maintains a constant dialogue with all of the Arkansas delegation. He schedules meetings when they are in state, and stays in communication with them via emails, phone calls and faxes. He has gained the respect of many on Capitol Hill.



For those of you who have sent emails to your congressional representatives about these issues, they have not gone unnoticed. It is your emails and faxes that have brought our issues to their attention. It has and will continue to make an impact. Now would be a great time to write Senator Lincoln and Congressman Ross and thank them for their support of our profession and for helping improve access to respiratory therapists for respiratory patients.

For more information about these and other legislative issues on the AARC agenda, log on to the AARC website and click on Government Affairs.