

Government Affairs: What does it mean to me?

LESLIE MARTINEAU, ANGELA PHILLIPS, KYLE RIDING

When someone asks what ASCLS does for its members, a very typical first response includes a description of the advocacy performed on our behalf. The clinical laboratory profession is a complex net of scientific information that is difficult in and of itself to understand. When the rules and regulations to which the government requires us to adhere are thrown in with the science, the result is a complex governmental system, intermingling with a complex scientific body of knowledge.

As ASCLS members attend a continuing education conference, we enter topic areas with which we are all comfortable, since educational programs tend to be geared towards the scientific aspects of our profession. On the other hand, when someone attends the first Legislative Symposium in Washington, DC, that individual enters a world that very few of our colleagues realize exists, a world focused on the governmental and regulatory issues to which we all adhere but don't often discuss. Acronyms and unfamiliar terminology begin to fly at you. Regardless of whether you know all of these terms or not, they are ones that affect your day-to-day routine.

Clinical laboratory professionals often see ourselves as the guardians of quality. We understand what it takes to ensure precise, accurate test results are obtained. The government, watching over the public it serves, understands that we do have a pivotal role in patient care and, for that reason, takes steps to protect the public. While those writing governmental legislation and regulation attempt to do their best to safeguard the public, from the clinical laboratory perspective, they sometimes fall short of the mark.

For that reason, ASCLS members must keep two important goals in mind. First, we must make it our mission to

.....
Washington Beat is intended to provide a timely synopsis of activity in the nation's capitol of importance to clinical laboratory practitioners. This section is coordinated by Paula Garrott and Judy Davis, Co-chairs of the ASCLS Government Affairs Committee; and Don Lavanty, ASCLS Legislative Counsel. Direct all inquiries to ASCLS, (301) 657-2768 ext. 3022, (301) 657-2909 (fax); or mail to ASCLS, 6701 Democracy Boulevard, Suite 300, Bethesda MD 20817, attn: Washington Beat.

understand how government works and how to speak its language as fluently as we speak the language of our scientific disciplines. Secondly, once we have the language of the government under our belts, we must make our voices heard when new legislation or regulation that affects our profession is before any branch of government. We must provide our legislators with the knowledge of laboratory science they need to assist them in making the right decisions that directly affect the quality, access and cost of laboratory results for the American public.

The Focus articles in the Spring 2009 issue of *Clinical Laboratory Science* sought to make the first mission easier by providing insight into how the government works and how to speak its language. They showed how you, as a clinical laboratory professional, fit into the government. We hope the articles demystified the world of governmental acronyms, and gave you insight into clinical laboratory reimbursement today. Armed with this information, you will now be ready to understand the most current hot topic in government affairs, the modernization of the clinical laboratory fee schedule. Educate yourself, learn the language, and be part of the system.

The most-rewarding part of getting involved in government affairs is advocating for clinical laboratory services to government officials. How many times in conversation do you find that people do not know what we do? It is no different in the world of government affairs. Government representatives need to be enlightened through conversations with you and me, experts in clinical laboratory services, about the valuable services we provide to our patients, communities, and our states.

As the newest members of the Government Affairs Committee, we understand how difficult it is to grasp the vast amount of information contained within these pages. Fortunately, we are lucky to have such a great group of leaders within ASCLS who are willing to clarify the tangled web the government weaves. Thanks to this leadership and the rest of the ASCLS Government Affairs Committee, we and all ASCLS members, can truly make a difference.

Leslie Martineau, Angela Phillips, and Kyle Riding are new members of the ASCLS Government Affairs Committee.