

From the Desk of Jeffrey Sandler, M.D. AAO Counselor

I had the honor of leading our Connecticut delegation to Congressional Advocacy Day and the Midyear Forum in Washington D.C. from April 9-12. Joining me were legislative co-chairmen Steve Thornquist, MD and Bill Ehlers, MD, OPHTHPAC committee member Andrew Packer, MD, and two terrific Yale residents, Samuel Yun, MD, and Krishna Priya Kalyam, MD.

On Advocacy Day, we went to Capitol Hill and met with legislative aides to Sen. Christopher Murphy, Sen. Dick Blumenthal, Rep. Jim Himes, Rep. Rosa DeLauro, Rep. John Larson, and Rep. Elizabeth Esty, as well as personally meeting with Sen. Murphy and Rep. Larsen. We were joined by AAO president Gregory L Skuta, MD, who presented Sen. Murphy with the AAO Visionary Award for his work on the compounding issue.

Our paramount issue was Medicare payment reform. It appeared that an SGR fix would become a reality this year, with a drastically reduced cost for long-term repeal as well as bipartisan and bicameral agreement. Unfortunately, for the 16<sup>th</sup> time in twelve years, physicians received a temporary patch. We emphasized that we were very disappointed and frustrated over this, and would like to see it fixed this year, as the bill is still in play. We also asked for support of the Electronic Improvements Act, which creates "hardship exemptions," tailors requirements to specialty specifics, and defines alternative meaningful use criteria. Additional issues discussed were a Truth in Advertising Marketing Act and fully funding the National Eye Institute.

As always, it was a pleasure to converse with the straight-talking Congressman John Larson and his legislative director David Sitcovsky. Mr. Larson told us he was shocked at the way the SGR Legislation was mysteriously swept under the carpet during the session and mentioned that he and many other members of Congress were genuinely interested in permanently fixing the SGR. David Sitcovsky was quite interested in the Transparency Bill and asked if we had any examples of allied healthcare workers misrepresenting themselves in print, websites, etc. While all congressmen and aides listened intently, it is trustingly difficult to advance any legislation.

The mid-year forum addresses the salient issues of the times, and this year the breakout sessions covered, among other matters, the changing reimbursement paradigms, the pitfalls of EHRs, the issues in healthcare integration, and the potential of Big Data. I have attached the Academy's

summary of the meeting. You will note that one speaker was the Lewis G Sandy, MD, executive vice president, clinical advancement, United Health Group, who talked about *Physician Profiling/United Premium Designation Program*. I found his remarks particularly off-putting, and the summary includes questions posed to him by Steve Thornquist and myself.

Please note that we send a Connecticut delegation to this meeting every year, and the meeting is open to all members. We would welcome your attendance and participation.

Please email me with questions/ comments.

Jeffrey Sandler, MD  
Connecticut Councilor to the AAO