



To Tour or Not to Tour

By Michael F. Conlan

Do you know where your senators and representatives are? It's August and Congress is in recess until Sept. 4. So, there's a good chance they'll be at home at least some of the time between globe trotting fact-finding missions.

August can be a slow time for pharmacies with all the "summer's ending" vacations before school opens, so it's a good time to schedule a pharmacy tour by elected officials. It's best, of course, if you've had prior personal or other contact with them, and it's true they might be more interested the closer they get to Election Day, but grassroots lobbying has to start somewhere.

Remember, you are the front-line expert on the Medicare Part D pharmacy benefit, the AMP-based Medicaid generic drug reimbursement, TRICARE mail order, and PBMs' take-it-or-leave contracts. Even if they wrote the law, you know more about its impact on you, your employees, and your patients—constituents all.

Legislators need a barometer of constituent opinions on key issues that you can provide at the intersection of prescription drugs and government policy. Listening to constituents—especially small business owners and employers—is an essential part of duty for legislators. They ignore it at their peril.

Thousands of their constituents come to your pharmacy every week. What politician couldn't imagine the impact of a single campaign poster in your pharmacy or just a good word when their name came up?

Key steps in a successful pharmacy tour are planning, conducting, and following up. NCPA has practical, first-hand knowledge about these events. Along with the Coalition for Community Pharmacy Action, the NCPA government affairs partnership with the National Association of Chain Drug Stores has conducted more than 100 pharmacy visits for lawmakers in the past year. If you're interested, contact the NCPA government affairs team in Washington. The team is the single most valuable tool you have to get involved in the national political process. You'll receive all

the information and advice you need to make your tour a success—getting the full value out of your time and the lawmaker's.

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They'll tell you the best way to arrange a tour; when to schedule one; what to prepare in advance; how to build in time for a one-on-one talk; what to expect in terms of questions from the legislator or a staffer; how to actually conduct the tour (make sure to invite the legislator behind the counter to see the professionalism involved with dispensing a prescription and the interaction with patients); and following up with thank you notes, e-mails, and future invites.

A pharmacy visit can get you some free publicity. If the legislator wants coverage, his or her staff will contact the local media. You can note the event on your Web site or newsletter, if you have them.

If you really have the political bug, and live in the early 2008 primary states such as New Hampshire, Iowa, and South Carolina, consider inviting a Republican or Democratic presidential candidate to your pharmacy. There certainly are enough of them, so you could probably pick one you actually like. Think how you'd feel with the future president of the United States in your pharmacy. One of them has to win, right? **ap**

Michael F. Conlan is editor of America's Pharmacist