



# Communication Is Key

By Michael F. Conlan

**E**-mails are flooding everyone's in box, and no where is that more evident than on Capitol Hill. Since 9/11, e-mails increasingly have become viewed as an accepted and effective way of communicating with congressional offices. (U.S. mail is screened for possible contamination and may take weeks to be delivered.)

Anyone can write an e-mail, but constructing an effective message to a lawmaker takes some thought. It should follow a plan. It should not ramble and usually be limited to one page. Any broad statements need convincing evidence to support them.

It should be polite. It should compellingly make our case. It always should offer further information or consultation. An invitation to visit your pharmacy is always appropriate.

Once done, e-mails are easy to blast out, but they can get lost in the torrent that rains down on Congress 24/7. There are two steps, however, that pharmacists can take to make sure that theirs have a fighting chance of getting the attention they deserve.

First, go to the NCPA Web site ([www.ncpanet.org](http://www.ncpanet.org)), click on "Grassroots Network," and enter your ZIP code to get your legislators' e-mail addresses. This legislative action center and the government affairs section are where you can get detailed information on NCPA's legislative priorities.

Second, the subject line is critical. Congressional offices are set up to receive, log, and respond to constituent e-mails. By putting "H.R.1474 the Fair and Speedy Treatment (FAST) of Medicare Prescription Drug Claims Act" in the subject line, your e-mail easily should be routed to the congressional staffer (most likely the health care legislative assistant) whose job it is to reply.

Make sure you include your full street address and phone number in the body of the e-mail. This is how the office knows you are a constituent. (Non-constituent e-mail is usually deleted.) Also include your professional

title, pharmacy name, address, phone number, how many people you employ, and how many patients you serve every day.

But your address and pharmacy information can come at the end of the e-mail. Right up front, clearly indicate the issue that you are writing about, your position, and what you want the legislator to do. Avoid long, convoluted arguments that keep the reader guessing what your conclusion will be.

Remember, *if you don't* contact your legislator, *who will?* Colleagues? Hopefully. *Opponents?* Definitely.

Stick to a single issue or bill. Discuss how it affects you, your small business pharmacy, your patients, or your local community. Mention the specific impact on your pharmacy's ability to provide quality care for your patients.

Be straightforward, clear, and concise. Avoid using jargon. (Don't assume everyone knows what "PBM" stands for.)

Everyone's entitled to their own opinion, but not their own set of facts. Be truthful. Attach supporting material. Use your credentials to substantiate your views. Share your expertise and front-line experiences.

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