



NCPA and the Obama Era

By Michael F. Conlan

The week before Barack Obama's inauguration, Bruce T. Roberts, RPh, briefed Obama's aides on community pharmacy's readiness to help the new administration fulfill its health care agenda. Roberts, NCPA's executive vice president and CEO, joined by L.D. King, executive director of the International Association of Compounding Pharmacists, said he set out three goals for the meeting with the transition team for the Department of Health and Human Services:

- Have the team understand that pharmacists play a critical role in our health care system and we envision them playing a much larger role.
- Have them recognize the importance of the profession and the industry and to make sure we have a seat at the table in the health care reform debate.
- Convey the need for strong leadership at the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Expanding on those points, Roberts also said:

- There are studies that demonstrate that for every dollar spent on prescription medicines there is a dollar's worth of problems from their misuse.
- There is an abundance of proof that if a prescription medicine is taken correctly there is significant value to the health of the patient and savings for the payer.
- Mirixa has compelling evidence of the value of face-to-face interaction between a pharmacist and a patient compared with how some Medicare Part D plans chose to offer MTM exclusively with a letter or a call center.
- The FDA must change "its nonsensical approach to compounding pharmacy" and it needs strong, effective new leadership.
- CMS also needs a strong, effective new leader. CMS too should change its approach to issues such as durable medication equipment surety bonds and accredi-

tation, and interpretation of legislation that smacks in the face of congressional intent.

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Another positive sign for community pharmacy had a short life when former Sen. Tom Daschle, Obama's choice for HHS Secretary and director of the newly established White House Office of Health Reform, withdrew from consideration over a tax issue. At his confirmation hearing Daschle had talked about the need to "change this paradigm from illness to wellness and encouraging students to come back into primary care and to be willing to be the kind of family practitioners that ought to be the anchor, the basis upon which our health care system is built... I think we ought to use our alternative providers. And I don't really like that term. But [use]... the nurses, the nurse practitioners, the physicians' assistants, far more effectively. Pharmacists can play a far more important role than they do. That, to me, is a very important part."

Hopefully whoever is confirmed will share that view. **ap**

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