



House Pharmacy Caucus Starts Anew

By Michael F. Conlan

The Congressional Community Pharmacy Coalition, an official House caucus established in 2007 by lawmakers at the suggestion of NCPA, held its first issues briefing of the 111th Congress early in the session.

Keith Hodges, NCPA first vice president and owner of Gloucester (Virginia) Pharmacy, was one of the invited briefers, as were staffers from the American Pharmacists Association and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores. They discussed the role pharmacists can play in health care reform and the necessity of including them as a prominent voice in order to achieve efficiency, accessibility, and real savings.

They also gave a legislative update, which included the need for an Average Manufacturer Price Medicaid fix this year and an exemption for pharmacies from the durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies accreditation and surety bond requirements recently imposed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Hodges also told the group about the many patient care services he provides his patients, which many in the audience of congressional aides indicated that they didn't know that pharmacists could provide.

The next briefing will be scheduled for the lawmaker members of the coalition.

CHANGE MEDICARE DME POLICIES, NCPA TELLS CONGRESS

NCPA has warned lawmakers that unless pending Medicare policies are reversed, independent pharmacies will be unable to help their elderly patients with their durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies needs.

"The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' recent interim final rule on competitive bidding—in addition to its regulations on accreditation and the [\$50,000] surety bond—will prove unduly burdensome to independent pharmacies and will cause many of them to leave the [Medicare] program," said an NCPA statement to the

House Small Business Committee's subcommittee on rural development, entrepreneurship, and trade, whose chairman is Rep. Heath Shuler (D-N.C.). "In the aborted first round of competitive bidding, less than 2 percent of the suppliers submitting bids were independent pharmacists, despite the fact that community pharmacies hold half of the active DME supplier numbers."

Visit the DME Resource Center at Pharmacist e-Link (www.pharmacistelink.com) for the latest insights on the topic from Bill Popomaronis, RPh, NCPA vice president, home health and long-term care pharmacy services.

FOREIGN IMPORTS BILLS SPONSORED IN CONGRESS

Legislation that would allow U.S.-licensed pharmacies and drug wholesalers to import Food and Drug Administration-approved medications from Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan has been introduced in the House and Senate. The measure also would allow individuals to purchase prescription drugs for their own use from FDA-inspected Canadian pharmacies.

The lead sponsors of the bipartisan legislation, S.525 and H.R.1298, are Sens. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), John McCain (R-Ariz.), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Reps. Marion Berry (D-Ark.) and Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.). *ap*

Michael F. Conlan is editor of America's Pharmacist.