Presenting public policy issues of importance to vascular surgeons: SVS PAC, Congress and you

BY CARLO A. DALL’OLMO, MD

Defining the narrative. It’s a cliché among pundits, board members and anyone who has a point to make or a story to tell. It is the defining difference between success and failure in our life’s circumstances, depicting what is done in a positive, persuasive manner versus an unfavorable one. Yes, it can cut both ways, resulting in favorable or unfavorable results, depending on how the narrative is presented. For an organization such as the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS), presenting the public policy issues of importance to vascular surgeons in a clear and concise manner to our elected officials is often the difference between success and failure.

As a member of the SVS, have you ever considered how critical controlling the narrative becomes when discussing our specialty’s needs and services with members of Congress? Think about that for a moment. Who will present our story—our history, our specialty, our services, our needs and those of the patients we serve to the public or healthcare policymakers? Who will challenge any misinformation about us that has been passed on to congressional aides and members of Congress so as to correct the errors? Who will be our conduits to educate these congressional members? Who will identify the unintended consequences of potential congressional mandates and legislation that affect our specialty, our patients and us?

The SVS does and will for its members—and the SVS Political Action Committee (SVS PAC) is critical, as it gives us the opportunity to attend fundraising events with members of Congress where we can discuss our issues with them directly.

Defining the information for policymakers on behalf of vascular surgeons is a process that does not occur in a vacuum or by serendipity. The process requires continual discussions by our SVS representatives with members of Congress and their staffs. Some occasions are opportunities for discussion and for learning. One such event was a lunch in December for Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA), a physician-member of Congress. The SVS PAC attended with other medical society PACs. Bera shared information regarding his work on the so-called “Surprise Billing” issue and also let us know he is interested in working on physician wellness, burnout and opportunities for alternative training environments. The SVS Government Relations Committee is now following up on his interest with the work of the SVS Wellness Task Force.

Developing policy at the federal level can be a very time-consuming process; some issues take literally years to
complete. The SVS PAC gives us another way to engage with members of Congress multiple times a year to continue to work together on issues of importance to vascular surgery. It is a vital link to the success of both our specialty and our practices.

Think about this when asked to donate to the PAC at vsweb.org/PAC. Who can provide information about vascular surgery better than us? Nobody. If, however, we shirk our responsibility and do not contribute to the PAC, then someone else with no “skin in the game” will control our narrative. Then, when the unintended consequences start piling up and impacting our practices negatively, we can try to tell our staff why we refused to defend ourselves when we had the opportunity.

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