

SVS Health Advocacy Report

Anahita Dua MD MS MBA

Vascular Surgery Fellow

Stanford Hospital and Clinics

Taking care of surgical patients encompasses much more than what we do in the operating room itself. The time spent getting to know the patient in clinic coupled with the hours our nurses, techs, and colleagues put in to get the work up completed serves as a fundamental platform on which we stand to make the safest and most appropriate surgical decision for our patients in the OR. But beyond that hospital world, another cornerstone of patient care comes from legislative policies that govern the care of these patients. Healthcare policies dictate how we train our doctors, how many doctors we train, where those doctors practice, and most importantly, *how* those doctors practice. They also determine what patients receive what type of care and how that care is rendered. Therefore, I have long believed that as a surgeon it is our duty to engage with lawmakers to create good healthcare policy as that it is an important aspect of taking care of patients. Ultimately, it is the surgeon that sees patients day in and day out, witnesses discrepancies in care or notices first hand the staffing shortages that can take a toll on both our patients and ourselves. Hence, it is our job to assist lawmakers in correctly delineating the issues impacting healthcare and guide them on techniques to legitimately fix these problems.

With this in mind, I applied for the SVS Vascular Surgery Trainee Advocacy Travel Scholarship and was honored to receive it for the 2017 academic year. Ms. Mindi Walker, the Director of the Washington office for the Society for Vascular Surgery, put together an agenda that included multiple congressional visits, a tour of the capital building, lunch with Senator R.

Johnson, and an opportunity to partake in SVS Government Relations Committee call. The purpose of the day was to expose me to the capital, discuss an important issue facing the medical community (resident shortages) with congressional staff and start to get a feel for how I can play an active part of being a liaison between patients and lawmakers.

I had the pleasure of meeting the staff for Rep Sensenbrenner, Rep Radcliffe, Rep Speier, and Senator Baldwin. In meetings with these members of staff we discussed a piece of legislature to reduce physician shortages that is titled the Resident Physician Shortage Act which aims to increase the number of Medicare-supported direct graduate medical education and indirect medical education slots by 15,000 between 2019-2023 to combat physician shortages. Importantly, it has been projected that the largest physician shortages will be felt in Vascular surgery and Neurosurgery so this bill is especially important for us as a profession to ensure that we have enough trainees for the aging US population. The meetings were received very well as I discussed my experiences at Stanford hospital as a current fellow and Ms. Walker, who has been a lobbyist quite familiar with the Hill for years, helped guide me through the process.

This experience was a strong, foundational step towards my professional intention of continuing a relationship with congressional leaders. I intend to use the knowledge I gained from this visit to further my career goal of being a legislative voice for the vascular surgery community and the needs of our patients on the national policy front. This scholarship afforded me the opportunity to see first hand how a bill gains support and what the pathway is to get it passed into law. I also was able to partake in the SVS government relations committee call and see the great work they are involved in at the Capital. Moving forward, I will continue to work with Ms. Walker at the Washington DC office to partake in opportunities to educate our lawmakers on medical issues that may yield good policy and intend to continue this aspect of service as an attending.

Overall, it was an amazing, eye opening, and powerful learning experience to see how as a surgeon I can work to care for my patients from every angle and I will use this experience as a launching pad from which I will continue to engage in legislative change throughout my professional life.