

LETTERS

Teaching Health Policy to Residents

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To the Editors:—We commend the recent article by Greysen et al. entitled “Teaching Health Policy to Residents—Three-Year Experience with a Multi-Specialty Curriculum” for highlighting the rising importance of health policy education for future physicians. Medical professionals have too long been criticized for not being involved in the political process. One reason physicians may be reluctant to engage in advocacy is the lack of training in effective participation in the political process. As the nation considers healthcare reform, it is imperative now more than ever that we train future physicians to advocate effectively for a healthcare system that can properly care for Americans. The George Washington curriculum outlined in recent JGIM paper is one step towards preparing physician-advocates.

Unfortunately, not every medical student and internal medicine resident has access to such high caliber faculty in public policy. Therefore, other solutions are needed to provide opportunities for all trainees to learn about health policy and advocacy. Interestingly, we have been fortunate to receive such training through ongoing programs for students and residents sponsored by the American College of Physicians. For the past five years, the American College of Physicians has hosted a special half day briefing for students and residents prior to its Leadership Day, which also invites internist members from all 50 states to receive up-to-date training on current health legislation debated in Washington and to participate in Hill visits with their elected officials. Over the past five years, 156 students and 342 residents have participated in these efforts.

By offering funding for medical students and residents to travel to Washington and participate in meetings with legislators and policy experts, future doctors receive hands-on experience that emphasizes the importance of policy development and communication with public officials. These opportunities offer valuable insight into the political process, particularly for physicians-in-training whose residency program or medical school may not have on-site expertise in health policy. Similar opportunities also exist through the American Medical Association, the American Medical Student Association and the Society of General Internal Medicine. By engendering participation in medical organizations early in one’s medical career and learning how to interact with the political process through this infrastructure, future physicians may have a more effective impact on legislation proceedings that affect health care. We encourage current and future physicians interested in learning more about health policy and advocacy to consider this opportunity as a way to learn and engage in the political process.

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