Efforts toward recognition proceed at every level

RACHEL BALICK

The pursuit of provider status recognition is one of the most prominent professional issues for pharmacists around the nation, and efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of pharmacist-delivered health care services are moving forward on Capitol Hill and in state houses.

In Washington

On June 8, the House Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health held a hearing on improving and sustaining Medicare. Reps. Todd Young (R-IN) and Ron Kind (D-WI) submitted comments that recommended passage of the Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act (H.R. 592/S. 314). Young and Kind are original sponsors of the legislation in the House. At press time, the legislation had 291 cosponsors in the House and 49 cosponsors in the Senate.

Young noted that the bill “improves health care access by allowing pharmacists to provide Medicare-covered services to underserved Medicare patients. This legislation would lead not only to reduced overall health care costs, but also to increased access to health care services and improved health care quality.”

Kind echoed these sentiments. “[Pharmacists] conduct health and wellness screenings, manage chronic diseases, provide medication management, facilitate care transitions, and provide immunizations. This legislation would allow the pharmacists serving underserved communities to be reimbursed for the services they provide.”

“APhA greatly appreciates the statements from Representatives Todd Young and Ron Kind in support of H.R. 592,” Michael Spira, former APhA Senior Lobbyist, told Pharmacy Today. “Their leadership in Congress and on the Ways & Means Committee will go a long way in passing this important piece of legislation and providing their constituents access to pharmacists’ patient care services.”

APhA and the Patient Access to Pharmacists’ Care Coalition, of which APhA is a member, also submitted statements for the record.

State action

Advocates of professional recognition for pharmacists also continue to advance efforts at the state level. Students at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (ACPHS) helped pass a Vermont opioid law that includes language with implications for provider status in that state. The new law allows health insurers to compensate pharmacists for otherwise-covered services included in a pharmacist’s scope of practice. The statute also acknowledges the important role pharmacists play in curbing opioid abuse.

ACPHS students performed research and collaborated with the Vermont Pharmacists Association to identify a sponsor for SB 243. In addition, they attended legislative sessions and spoke about the expanding role of pharmacists in optimizing drug therapy and providing health care.

“As medication experts, pharmacists can play a key role in combating this national problem by educating patients, families, and in some cases, prescribers, on how [opioids] work and the potential risks for addiction,” said Robert Hamilton, PharmD, interim dean of the School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, said in a news release.

“The passage of SB 243 represents a major step forward for both pharmacists and patients, and we applaud Vermont legislators for their foresight on this issue.”

The law also establishes a controlled substances and pain management advisory council that will include a community pharmacist representative. Gov. Peter Shumlin of Vermont signed the bill on June 8.

Rachel Balick, Assistant Editor