

SBCMS Physician Leaders Meet with Congressional Representatives

In early March SBCMS President Rodney Borger, MD; President-Elect Rick Murray, MD; medical student leaders Laura Gephart and Ryan Eggers, and SBCMS/CMA Past President Dev GnanaDev, MD joined a delegation of CMA physicians who attended the AMA National Advocacy Conference (NAC) and personally met with members of Congress or their staff including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, Congressmen Henry Waxman, Joe Baca, Jerry Lewis, Pete Stark, Jackie Speier, and Nancy DeParle, Director of the White House Office of Health Reform.



Left to right: Dustin Corcoran; Dev GnanaDev MD; Nancy DeParle, Director of the White House Office of Health Reform; Brennan Cassidy MD; and Steve Larson MD.

They stressed the concerns of seniors, veterans, and the physicians who care for them regarding the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) cuts. Even without the cuts, Medicare rates have been stagnant for the better part of a decade, failing to keep up with inflation, much less the skyrocketing costs of providing care in California. The cuts would have made it impossible for many physicians to keep their doors open to seniors and veterans under Medicare and Tricare, even forcing some doctors to shutter their practice completely.



Left to right: Dev GnanaDev MD; US Representative Jerry Lewis (R), 41st District; Rodney Borger MD; and Rick Murray MD.

They emphasized their concern on proposed legislation that builds health care reform on the foundation of Medicaid where access to physicians in California is already difficult. If the Medicaid program is expanded to cover nearly 2 million of California's uninsured, resources must be provided to improve physician participation. Physicians want to care for California's seniors and newly insured Medicaid patients, but Medicare and Medicaid need serious reform for physicians to participate.

The delegation also focused on the following issues:

1. Adopting the House Medicare Locality Border Update (GPCI) for California
2. Eliminating the Medicare Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB)
3. Continuing Physician Quality Reporting Programs only through Pilot Programs
4. Giving Patients the Right to Privately Contract with Physicians
5. Training of new physicians, including ensuring funding for loan forgiveness programs
6. Increasing, incentivizing primary care training spots
7. Increasing Medicare funded residency spots in the West.

Congress has informed CMA that it is passing a temporary fix in order to maintain the possibility of passing a more permanent and lasting fix to the SGR formula as part of health reform. CMA/SBCMS strongly supports the permanent repeal of the SGR.



Personal testimony from medical student Ryan Eggers

"This was my first visit to Washington, DC and I was honored to be serving in this capacity. It was very exciting to be part of an organization so integral in the advocacy for patients, physicians, and medical students. I had the opportunity to meet with legislative assistants for Senators Boxer and Feinstein and Representative Jerry Lewis. My colleagues and I discussed the pressing need for increased funding for GME [Graduate Medical Education] positions, the negative effects of the burden of graduate debt on the profession of medicine, and how those shortcomings are ultimately harming the people of our state. The opportunity to represent the medical students of Southern

California was an honor. It reinforced in my mind the value of organized medicine and political action, and it convinced me of my future in advocacy for my peers and future patients. I had a fantastic experience in Washington, DC and I am indebted to the San Bernardino County Medical Society for sponsoring my trip, since it would have been impossible without their support."

Medical students Laura Gephart and Jennian Yi kick up their heels

