CHRISTUS SANTA ROSA HEALTH CARE in San Antonio considers political advocacy to be an important part of our commitment to the community. Our advocacy efforts include working to ensure that everyone in the community has access to health care, especially children and the elderly. In addition to striving to address the number of uninsured members of our community, we also deal with policy issues that may have an impact on our ability to deliver quality care.

Our board plays two key roles in helping CHRISTUS Santa Rosa accomplish its advocacy goals. First, the board is ultimately responsible for ensuring we have the resources to carry out our advocacy mission. Second, trustees are critical for delivering our advocacy message to elected officials and the public.

CHRISTUS Santa Rosa has two staff members who work solely on advocacy issues—analyzing legislative initiatives, keeping the board and management informed, and developing relationships with community leaders and elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels. This level of staffing is an indicator of the importance the board places on our advocacy function.

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One of the most effective ways, however, to get advocacy issues heard by others is through the organization’s own board members. The advocacy staff is responsible for providing information to board members so that they are well-prepared when representing the organization in civic and government settings.

As members of the community, it is important for trustees to attend civic group meetings and other functions along with hospital staff, not only to gain a better understanding of the chief health care concerns community members share, but also to communicate the benefits that CHRISTUS Santa Rosa offers to them. Trustees bring credibility to the hospital in ways that staff alone cannot. They are chosen to serve on the board precisely because they are already known and respected by community leaders.

Along with management, trustees also meet with elected officials. Many of the issues that CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health Care advocates for are affected by what happens with state and federal programs, such as SCHIP, Medicaid and Medicare. CHRISTUS Santa Rosa believes its leadership—board and management—may be best able to explain to state and federal legislators the consequences of legislative proposals that have an impact on health care for the community. Board members generally make ideal advocates when their CEO has communicated the significance of legislative issues to them.

For trustees who have not previously been involved in advocacy, it is never too late to begin. With the support of our advocacy staff, board members unfamiliar with the advocacy process can work with senior management and other board members to become aware of core issues and how to present them to community or government representatives. The key is being able to understand and to articulate what the issues are from a community perspective, as well as from their own personal viewpoint, such as that of a business owner. To get started in advocacy, CHRISTUS Santa Rosa Health Care suggests these five steps:

1. **Discover existing relationships.** Find out where relationships between your organization, members of Congress and state/local government officials exist.

2. **Find interested participants.** Identify individuals who are willing to become public policy advocates.

3. **Participate in advocacy initiatives.** Trustees typically write letters, make phone calls and visit lawmakers to present policy facts.

4. **Contact your legislators.** Develop relationships with legislators before your organization needs them, in order to be ready to contact them on advocacy issues.

5. **Develop an advocacy profile.** Evaluate your existing relationships with senators and representatives and develop methods for building and strengthening these relationships.

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