

**As community leaders, trustees are a powerful voice for their hospitals or health systems when it comes to advocacy.** They can offer legislators “real life” insights and perspectives into the challenges facing patients and community members in the hospital’s service area, as well as how legislation and regulation will affect the women and men who work every day to fulfill their hospitals promise of help, hope and healing.

Trustees know how hard their hospitals and health systems are working to transform the way health care is delivered in their communities. They have an important role to play in making their state and federal policymakers understand how a modernized public policy environment can help hospitals advance health in America and provide patients with the access to care they need.

Throughout the year, the AHA calls on hospital leaders to advocate on various issues on Capitol Hill, from protecting patients from cuts to hospital funding to reducing red tape and decreasing the administrative burden on hospitals... and many other issues.

When the AHA calls on trustees to step up to the plate as advocates for their hospitals and health systems, the results are impressive. For example, our trustee advocates weighed in with their senators this past summer and urged them to oppose efforts to repeal and replace parts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). They helped persuade enough Republican senators to balk at proposals that threatened to remove health care coverage to millions of needy Americans.

Some examples. In Pennsylvania, trustees at Byrn Mawr-based Main Health Line joined with the health system’s employees and medical staff members to urge Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., to oppose the Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA). Toomey was one of 13 Republican members tasked with drafting the bill. They called on Toomey to protect coverage and ensure that the most vulnerable patient would not be harmed by any health care legislation to clear the Senate.

Charleston (W.Va) Area Medical Center trustees expressed their concerns about the bill to Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito. So did trustees at Huntington, W.Va.-based Valley Health, who contacted Capito with one message: Protect coverage.

Likewise, trustees at Cincinnati-based Tri Health and Cleveland-based MetroHealth wrote personal letters to Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio, expressing their opposition to the BCRA. They told Portman rejecting the legislation was in the best interest of patients.

Following up to his summer advocacy, Metro Health trustee J.B. Silvers, M.D., also weighed

in with Portman on the Senate GOP's Graham-Cassidy-Heller-Johnson proposal to repeal and replace parts of the ACA.

Silvers is a trustee with considerable health care policy expertise. He is a professor of health finance at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management, a former CEO of health plan QualChoice - University Hospitals Health System, and a former member of the Prospective Payment Assessment Commission – the predecessor to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission or MedPAC.

In a Sept. 20 letter to the senator, Silvers said Congress needs to “stabilize the ACA markets and continue the Medicare expansion rather than destroy them with the Graham-Cassidy bill.” He warned Portman that “millions would be deprived of access and the biggest employers in many Ohio towns will be laying off staff due to their resulting financial distress.”

Silvers says it is critical for hospital and health system trustees to make their voices heard with state and federal legislators. “Advocacy is part of a board member’s responsibility to his or her organization,” he says. “It’s part of the fiduciary responsibility of a board member to address external threats as well as oversee internal activity.”

As Silvers observed, such direct political action by community leaders, like hospital and health system trustees, is needed whenever a hospital’s or health system’s ability to do the best for their patients and community is challenged.

No member of the hospital family can get results like board members, who are a respected and independent voice in the community. Trustees are not being paid to lobby, and have no economic stake in the outcome of their hospital or health system. They volunteer their time and energy because they know how important hospitals are to the quality of life and economic vitality of their towns and cities.

An important note: As you think of ways to advocate for your hospital and community, remember that it is important to work with your hospital administrators to coordinate any contact with legislators to make sure you’re speaking off the same page and not working at cross-purposes, thereby confusing your legislators.

There are other, more formal ways to become involved in advocacy at the national level. For examples, by joining the AHA’s Committee on Governance (COG). The COG, composed of 28 leading trustees from across the country, gives the AHA a trustee perspective in the areas of advocacy, policy, education and community leadership.

“The ability to connect regularly with 28 trustees from across the nation who are all dealing with the transformation of health care is invaluable,” says COG Immediate Past Chair Margaret Dahl, a trustee at WellStar Health Network, an accountable care organization in Marietta, Ga. “The information sharing and the commitment to advocacy is very powerful and the ability to bring

this type of information back home reinforces trustee credibility and trust within our specific communities.”

Hospital and health system trustees should consider serving on the COG “because it is truly a way to have a direct impact on what is the largest and most prestigious hospital association in the country,” Dahl says. “COG voices are respected and acknowledged as the part of this field that makes profound decisions every day to ensure their community’s health care is high-quality, safe and reasonable.”

Applications for involvement, including positions on the COG, will be available in early January 2018 To receive a copy please email [trustees@aha.org](mailto:trustees@aha.org).

As a trustee leader – if you are not doing so already – put your unique skills, talents and leadership to use as political advocates for your hospitals and health systems. You owe your patients and communities no less.

*Andrew Stern is a trustee at the Medical City Dallas Hospital in Dallas, TX and 2017 chair of the American Hospital Association’s Committee on Governance.*