

EMS, FIRE
RESCUE
HAZMAT
DISASTER
MANAGEMENT

BEST PRACTICES

IN EMERGENCY SERVICES

EMS Leaders Cooperate in an Effort to Gain Political Clout in Washington

Representatives of most of the national EMS associations met in Dallas in January to discuss the formation of an EMS political action committee (PAC), an EMS Congressional caucus and other ways to more effectively lobby on Capitol Hill. This cooperative effort stands in sharp contrast to last year's conflicting positions by the associations on where EMS fits into the federal government.

"We're not going to get anywhere in promoting EMS as a profession if we can't work together," said National Association of EMTs (NAEMT) President Ken Bouvier, who attended the meeting and has actively promoted cooperation between EMS associations. Last year, Bouvier led his 19,000-member association to adopt a policy platform that calls for "open and constructive working relationships with all the major federal agencies involved in EMS, as well as all national associations and organizations that have influence on EMS personnel."

National EMS Management Association (NEMSMA) board member Gary Wingrove, who along with NEMSMA President Darryl Coontz organized the meeting, agreed that cooperation is essential to gaining political clout in Washington.

"Most industries that are successful with Congress, including our public safety partners, police and fire, use a three-pronged approach: A PAC, which supports the campaigns of candidates who are interested in, are proven champions or are in decision-making positions; a caucus, which advances favorable legislation; and lobbying, which works with all mem-

bers of Congress and spawns grassroots activities," Wingrove explained. "EMS will not advance because we constantly complain about our situation. We need good data, and most importantly, we need to work within the system in the way the system is designed. Police and fire figured this out long ago; EMS needs to follow their lead."

Also onboard with the concept is Robert Suter, MD, immediate past president of the 23,000-member American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). "Emergency care providers need to stand together and proclaim that all aspects of emergency care, including EMS, need to be recognized and funded as an essential public service," he said. "It is only by supporting each other that we will prevail in increasing the resources available to provide quality EMS and emergency care. If any sector attempts to advance its own interests alone, given the way that DC works, it will likely be at the expense of other emergency care providers."

Advocates for EMS Expands Governing Board

One of only a few currently existing EMS lobbying groups, Advocates for

EMS is doing its part in reaching out to the EMS community by expanding representation on its board. Advocates for EMS was founded in 2002 by the National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP) and the National Association of State EMS Directors (NASEMSD) to lobby on behalf of EMS policy and funding issues in Washington. "The big news is that Advocates is now looking to expand its board-level membership," said its immediate Past President Mary Hedges. "The National Association of EMTs and the National Association of EMS Educators have agreed, at the invitation of Advocates, to become equal partners. So there will actually be four organizations leading the board of Advocates. Of course, everyone is welcome to join Advocates as members, but the four board-level organizations will be leading the decision-making process as to what areas we will focus on."

Advocates' elected leadership reflects the evolving cooperation among its leading organizations. Newly installed Advocates President is Nathan Williams, who is a past president of NAEMT. Newly elected Advocates President Elect is Robert O'Connor, MD, MPH, FACEP,

Continued on back

FEATURED INSIDE

Ruminations on Workforce Issues	14	Danger on the Ambulance	18
A Quick Look at the News	15	Dispatch Center Best Practices	21
Evidence-Based Management	16	Condition Codes, EMTALA and More	22
Media Monitor	17	Washington Monitor	23

Call 858-456-8600 now to subscribe.

who is the current president of NAEMSP. While its four leading organizations foot a large portion of its costs, Advocates also has 37 organizational members, all of which contribute to paying for Cornerstone Government Affairs, which is Advocates' lobbying arm in Washington.

EMS PAC

The meeting in January was divided into two parts, the first of which was limited to representatives from NEMSMA, NAEMT, NAEMSE, NAEMSP and the International Association of Flight Paramedics (IAFP) to discuss the formation of a joint EMS PAC. None of these member-based organizations has a PAC, yet all expressed interest in forming one, which would allow them to solicit donations from their members to use in supporting or defeating political candidates. In contrast, ACEP, the American Ambulance Association (AAA), the American College of Surgeons (ACS) and others have their own PACs, and were not part of the PAC discussion.

Cornerstone's Lisa Meyer said the process of forming an EMS PAC would require knowledgeable legal counsel and consultation with the Federal Election Commission (FEC), as well as the possible creation of a non-profit corporation. The group agreed to explore the possibility of forming under the umbrella of Advocates for EMS, which is a non-profit; however, NAEMSP Executive Director Deidre Gish-Panjada expressed concern that the PAC might divert funds from Advocates.

The representatives will take the issue back to their respective boards and reconvene by telephone in February.

NEMSMA's Coontz was optimistic but cautious about success. "It's going to take a grassroots effort," he said. "We need to organize ourselves and get a good message out that people will understand and get behind. We're going to need money, organization and a solid message."

EMS Caucus

Discussion of an EMS caucus included representatives of 13 emergency services organizations, all of which expressed interest in the caucus concept, but also were concerned about maintaining their

ability to represent their individual needs to members of Congress. Representatives from NAEMSP, ACEP, ACS and the American Heart Association, for example, all wanted the organizing issues of an EMS caucus to be large enough to encompass emergency medicine, as well as EMS. "Given the budgetary realities of 2006, healthcare funding overall is a zero-sum game," said ACEP's Suter. "If improving the total resources to provide quality care to patients in the emergency care system is to be achieved, it will be essential for all components of the system to support each others' needs and collaborate in pursuing strategies such as an EMS caucus."

On the other hand, AAA President-Elect James McPartlon, who attended the meeting, said, "The strength of the EMS community and its success with regards to moving forward with our agenda on Capitol Hill is that we all sing from the same song book. In other words, there's power in numbers, and we need to present ourselves and a cohesive message to members of congress and the federal agencies. But a caucus is only one piece of an overall plan."

At the end of the day, all the attendees agreed that there was an important need for an increased awareness of EMS systems, recognizing that EMS is an essential public service and a major component of the emergency care system. They also agreed that the leading issues for an EMS caucus included but were not limited to: data collection, domestic preparedness, Medicare/Medicaid funding, programmatic funding, and safety and workforce issues. They also agreed that the creation

of a lead EMS office in a specific federal department should not be the primary focal point of an EMS caucus. The representatives will go back to their boards to obtain support for an EMS caucus and will reconvene in April for further discussion.

Hurdles to Overcome

While many representatives at the EMS meeting expressed optimism about the future, several hurdles must be overcome. Chief among these are competition for influence from already existing PACs and caucuses representing the fire service, nurses and other EMS stakeholders. Neither the International Association of Fire Fighters nor nursing associations were invited to attend the meeting.

Competition for resources is a second hurdle, particularly when it comes to finding a Congressional representative to champion the EMS cause on the Hill and carry the effort to form a caucus. And finally, no lobbying effort can become successful without significant funding support.

Despite these hurdles, Hedges noted that the importance of the meeting should not be overshadowed. "It's significant that the various organizations wanted to come together to talk about unifying in support EMS on Capitol Hill," she said.

Success, added Coontz, depends on follow-through. "We've had a meeting, and everyone said lots of complimentary things, and everyone wants to do this, but we're going to have to keep in contact with one another and make sure everyone is talking to their boards and moving forward," he said. 🐬

Need-to-Know Definitions

A Political Action Committee (PAC) is an organization dedicated to raising and spending money to either elect or defeat political candidates. It can be formed under FEC rules as a non-connected, issue-oriented PAC or as a PAC that is connected to an organization or labor union.

A Congressional caucus is an organized but informal group of members of Congress that promotes or advocates for a specific interest. The number of active caucuses has been increasing in the last 20 years, and around 200 exist at any given time. Caucuses can involve hundreds of members of Congress, as does the Congressional Fire Service Caucus, or they can be small, with only a few members. They can be bipartisan and can exist in the House or Senate.

Call 858-456-8600 now to subscribe.