

CAN ADVOCACY REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE? I'M JUST ONE PEDIATRICIAN.

As a pediatrician, you have the ability to influence change. You have a story that is both personal and powerful in illustrating why changes and reforms in children's health and safety need to be addressed. You also have the credibility and authority that accompanies your profession. People, including decision-makers and community leaders, will listen to what you have to say.

Additionally, it is important for you to know that you are not alone in your efforts. Your advocacy efforts are part of a larger movement coming from pediatricians and AAP chapters around the country who are using their voice and credibility to change the way broader systems respond to children's health issues. You are joining countless other pediatricians, parents, teachers, and child advocates who want to see children's health become a greater priority. Together, you will make a meaningful and lasting difference for children in your community and state, and nationwide.

DO DECISION-MAKERS REALLY CARE WHAT I AS A PEDIATRICIAN HAVE TO SAY?

As a pediatrician, your community leaders and decision-makers are influenced by what you have to say because

YOU CAN PUT A HUMAN FACE ON THE ISSUE

The unique story and perspective you bring helps decision-makers put a human face on the issue. Your story is much more tangible to them than data alone. Through sharing your story, decision-makers can understand how the issue personally affects children living within their communities.

YOU HAVE INFLUENCE

By nature of your profession, you can get a decision-maker to respond to you in a way that sometimes other citizens cannot.

YOUR STORY REPRESENTS OTHER CONSTITUENTS IN THEIR AREA

When you contact a decision-maker, you are not just representing yourself, but also children and their families and potentially others in your community who care about children's health and well-being. If an issue is important to you, most decision-makers will assume that the issue is of importance to others as well.

HOW DO I GET STARTED? WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Start by choosing an issue that you care about. Take a few minutes to explore why you care about this issue, what it is that you want to change, and how this change can impact your patients. Consider using the "Identifying Your Story" tool included in the Tools and Support section of this chapter.

Most of what you need to know to be an effective advocate you already know. You know that you have a powerful story to tell. You know that you have credibility and influence in your community and that your decision-makers care what you have to say. You also know that you have research, facts, and science to add additional support to your efforts.

Nearly everything else you need is included in this guide. As you get started with your advocacy efforts, remember that you don't need to be an expert on the decision-making process, or know all the ins and outs of how your community, state legislature, or Congress works. This guide will provide you with a general overview of what you need to know, as well as tip sheets, tools, and resources to guide you along the way. Additionally, your AAP chapter can also provide you with support.

HOW CAN I EFFECTIVELY TELL MY STORY WITHOUT BREACHING PATIENT CONFIDENTIALITY?

Putting a human face on your story does not mean that you need to specifically identify your patients. Instead, consider talking generally about the 9-year-old girl you know who doesn't have health insurance coverage, or the 14-year-old boy you treated with severe head injuries because he wasn't wearing a helmet while skateboarding. Telling your story using generalities such as these does not violate patient confidentiality and still allows you to paint a personal picture illustrating why your issue matters.

THIS ADVOCACY SOUNDS GOOD IN THEORY, BUT I'M REALLY BUSY. HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE ME TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

There are many, many ways that you can be an effective advocate in less than 1 hour per month. Regardless of whether you take 5 minutes to e-mail your decision-maker, 30 minutes to write a letter to the editor of your local paper, an hour to speak at a community meeting, or a day to participate in your chapter's "Day at the Capitol," your advocacy is making a difference.

WHAT ARE SOME CONCRETE WAYS THAT I CAN WORK ADVOCACY INTO MY PROFESSIONAL SETTING?

Advocacy can quickly and easily fit into the work you are doing every day. Consider some of the following ways to integrate advocacy into your professional setting:

SET THE HOME PAGE OF YOUR WEB SITE TO YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER'S WEB SITE

This can allow you to quickly learn what's going on in your community, who's active, and who's making the decisions.

WRITE A QUICK OP-ED OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

If you see an article in your local paper that interests you or that reflects what you are seeing with your patients every day, consider writing a brief letter to your newspaper about the importance of this issue to children's health. Check with the AAP for sample letters or op-eds already crafted by other chapters on popular issues, and adapt to the unique characteristics of your community, if appropriate.

RESPOND TO ACTION ALERTS FROM YOUR CHAPTER, THE AAP, OR A COALITION YOU ARE PART OF

Many advocacy groups, including the AAP, have electronic action alerts. Consider signing up to receive action alerts from groups whose issues match your interests. It usually takes just a few minutes to take action electronically.

MAKE IT EASY TO CALL YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS WHEN YOU HAVE A FEW FREE MINUTES

Program the phone numbers of your community leaders or state and federal public officials into your cell phones. That way, their numbers are always ready to dial whenever you receive an action alert and have time available in your schedule or have a crucial issue to raise with them.

TALK TO OTHER PEDIATRICIANS, PHYSICIANS, OTHER HEALTH CARE CLINICIANS, AND PARENTS

Remember that as a pediatrician, you have a lot of credibility. Take a few minutes to talk to colleagues and others you work with about the importance of the issue you are involved in, and let them know how they can support the issue themselves.

INVITE COMMUNITY LEADERS OR DECISION-MAKERS TO TOUR YOUR PROFESSIONAL SETTING

Invite community leaders and elected officials to spend some time visiting your professional setting. This can give them a chance to see the children, families, and issues that you care about firsthand.

TEACH ADVOCACY WITHIN YOUR RESIDENCY PROGRAMS

Talk to residents about the importance of advocacy, or teach them advocacy skills through grand rounds or noon conferences.

SET UP AN INFORMATIONAL TABLE ABOUT YOUR ISSUE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL SETTING

Put up a display in your professional setting that brings awareness to the issue that you care about. Use the display as a way to get others involved in your advocacy efforts, such as a sign-up sheet to receive updates from an organization working on the issue, instructions for writing a letter to a decision-maker on the issue, or voter registration materials.

WHAT ARE POTENTIAL ROLES THAT PEDIATRICIANS CAN PLAY AT THE COMMUNITY ADVOCACY LEVEL?

Some examples of the role that you as a pediatrician could play in community advocacy could include

- Partnering with child advocacy organizations in your area
- Informing community leaders, decision-makers, and elected officials about issues that are affecting children in your community
- Inviting decision-makers to visit your professional setting or community project
- Providing testimony and telling your story at community forums, events, and in your local media
- Serving on the board of an organization that supports children's health and well-being or children's interests such as a school board
- Offering medical expertise to schools, youth organizations or institutions, and child care centers
- Asking parents, teachers, and other health care professionals and clinicians in your area to get involved in local efforts to improve children's health and well-being
- Initiating a community project or forming a partnership, alliance, or coalition to address a problem

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF ROLES THAT PEDIATRICIANS CAN PLAY AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL?

Potential roles that you as a pediatrician could play in state and federal advocacy include

- Writing, e-mailing, or calling your state or federal lawmakers on behalf of children's health issues that you feel strongly about
- Getting involved with your chapter in order to network on issues you are passionate about
- Participating in the AAP Key Contacts program, which helps pediatricians develop a relationship with their federal lawmakers and provide their expertise as a pediatrician to the lawmaker
- Developing a relationship with your local elected official so that you can become a trusted source of information to that decision-maker
- Voting for candidates who make children's health a priority
- Supporting child-friendly candidates through volunteer time and financial contributions

- Participating in your chapter or another statewide child advocacy group's "Day at the Capitol"
- Testifying at a state or federal hearing, in collaboration with your chapter or the national AAP, or at a public meeting on behalf of an issue you care about
- Taking part in candidate forums, such as asking questions of the candidates; signing on as a candidate forum cosponsor; or recruiting other pediatricians, health care providers, and child advocates to attend
- Participating in a press conference or media interview in support of a state or federal issue that affects children's health and/or the pediatric profession

PEDIATRICIAN ADVOCACY STORY

I was asked to provide testimony at the state legislature as 1 of 3 speakers representing my state chapter. It was several years after the measles outbreak and the state health department had decided to require a second MMR vaccine. However, some legislators were in opposition to the vaccine because they viewed it as "Big Brother" trying to tell their constituents how to live their lives.

My job was to present the bigger medical picture of how the vaccine requirement would get implemented, and how it would positively affect the health of the states' children. I was really nervous and, frankly, doubtful that I was the right person to carry this important message. After I was finished, a long-standing and very powerful member of the committee, clearly peeved at what we were saying, said to me directly, "Dr Grossman. You said that more than 120 people died in the country as a whole as a result of this measles outbreak. Is that correct?" I responded affirmatively that there were more than 120 deaths from measles, more than half in young children. The legislator then responded, "Only 120? That doesn't seem like an awful lot of people to me now!"

I was absolutely speechless for several minutes, but after regaining my composure I said, "In my way of thinking, even one death of a child, especially a totally preventable, unnecessary death, is one death too many." The bill to prohibit the state health department from mandating immunizations for schoolchildren died right then, and children in the state began to receive a second vaccine.

I believe that my story illustrates what any child advocate can and must do. We can make a difference, and we do, all over the country, in big ways (occasionally) and in smaller ways (constantly), every single day. Our young patients cannot vote and have no financial or political clout, so we must do it for them.

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