

## **AARC/SDSRC PACT Meeting**

**April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016-Washington DC**

Carleen and I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for sending us to Washington DC to represent SD at the 2016 PACT Annual meeting and Hill Day. We would also like to thank everyone who e-mailed their SD Representatives. There were 53 e-mails sent. Do you think we can do better than that? We have an idea on how to double that number today and ongoing as people read this on the website. Want to know how? Please get out your smart phones right now (even if you have previously sent an e-mail). If you do not have a smart phone, please take notes and do this when you get home, or I will help you after the annual meeting. First go to your web browser and type in AARC Virtual Lobby Week. Find the e-mail button on the top R) corner and click on that. Next please click on the Respiratory Therapists Support Medicare Telehealth Parity Act. Type in your zip code and scroll down to the bottom and hit go. The e-mails are already written for you, but if you want to write a personal message, you are more than welcome to do so. Next just scroll down to your name and information and fill all the spaces in with your personal information. Next if you know the e-mails of your friends or family, fill them in and send the e-mail. You are done! Thank You for supporting your profession and most of all your patients.

How many of you know what the HR 2948 Medicare Telehealth Parity Act is all about? In a nut shell, it is a bill that would include RT, PT, OT, Audiologists, and Diabetic Educators to provide education and treatment using telehealth services. This would improve health care in all of our communities. There are several more telehealth bills being looked at on the national level. HR 2948 is the only one that specifically mentions RTs. There is another Tele-Health bill, S4442 that Senator Thune is co-sponsoring. This bill does NOT mention RTs. Carleen and I were tasked with making sure that Senator Thune was aware of this oversight.

During our first meeting we had quite a crowd. We met with Senator Thune, and one of his Legislative Aids, Dennis D'Aquila and his Legislative Correspondent, Justin Bergeson. We brought Tom Kallstrom (Executive Director and CEO of the AARC) and 2 members of his family, Christopher his brother and Gibson his nephew. We were also joined by Sam Giardano (former Executive Director of the AARC). We felt this meeting went well and we did make sure that Senator Thune was aware that his bill that he is co-sponsoring did not include RT. He seemed genuinely surprised by this information. Tom and his family were able to share a story of when their mother and grandmother respectively was in the hospital and how Carleen cared for her. Gibson also talked about his personal experience with controlling his Asthma. We were also able to share the AARC article that Char wrote that Senator Thune's office requested to be written last year.

Our next meeting was with Congresswoman Kristi Noem's Legislative Assistant, Matthew Hittle. He reported that he had received several phone calls that morning in support of us. What a great surprise. Matt was very open to listening to us and we had a nice visit. He did bring up that the CBO (Congressional Budget Office) needs to score how much any of the telehealth bills will cost. He also expressed frustration about this delay. He told us that he personally feels that telehealth will decrease costs, not increase it. We did hear this request at every meeting. He did make a request for more studies on the impact of having RTs managing chronic disease. All requests were passed along to the AARC Executive Officers.

Our last meeting was with Senator Mike Rounds's Legislative Assistant, Peter Eckrich. He again echoed the request for CBO to score the telehealth bills. We did have a nice conversation with Peter. We were getting our picture taken outside of the Senator's office, when Senator Rounds came walking up. We requested a picture with him and we were able to obtain that.

At our RT debriefing meeting, many states reported that they have commitments from their representatives to co-sponsor and /or support this bill. We really feel like this year may be the year to get this bill through. So please keep e-mailing your representatives to keep this bill and the capabilities of RTs on their minds. One of the most profound things that was said at this meeting, was from a patient who traveled from California to be in Washington DC with us. He said that he would not be here today without the amazing care of his RTs. Thank you for all you do every day to care for your patients.

Sincerely;

Carleen Waltner & Char Raley

2016 PACT Representative's from SD