

## AARC Capitol Hill Day

March 6, 2012

Washington, DC

Again, this year was a sunny day on the Hill. We had 46 states represented. There were 135 RTs and 32 patient advocates. Four patient organizations were represented: Alpha 1 Association, COPD Foundation, Alpha 1 Foundation, and the Pulmonary Hypertension Association.

We advocated for HR 941, the Medicare Respiratory Therapy Initiative. Prior to attending these meetings with our Congress people, many of you sent letters via the Capitol Connection to ask support for HR 941. I want you all to know that you did the best ever sending emails to our Congress people. We were the only state to break double digits (11.4%) when comparing the number of licensed therapists vs. the number of activists. **Fifty therapists** from South Dakota sent 179 messages!!!! Way to go!!!! Thank you so much for supporting HR 941. Last year we sent 44 messages from 16 therapists. Every year it is an ongoing race to see which state sends the most messages. Last year we were 39<sup>th</sup> and this year we were **18<sup>th</sup>**. We are a small state but we showed them what we are capable of doing. Let's do even better next year! Thanks everyone!

For those of you not so familiar with Medicare HR 941, we were advocating for RRTs with a bachelor degree to be allowed to work in a physicians' office doing education with patients about their disease process, teaching asthma education, teaching MDIs, quit smoking programs, etc. This would allow the physician to be at the hospital or out of the office and allow the RRT to work without direct supervision. At this point the physician has to be in the office for the office/physician to be reimbursed for any education that the physician does not have time to do. We have documented information that shows decreased readmissions by 41%.

When anyone tries to add/change a new law, a CBO (Congressional Budget Office) score has to be done to show the cost effect. The initial score was \$100 billion over 10 years. The Senate scored it to show it would cost \$2 billion over 10

years and the House said \$3 billion over 10 Years. The AARC had an independent firm score this bill that showed it would be \$5 billion over 5 years. So we believe this scoring was based on 145,000 respiratory therapists instead of approximately 1,800 RRTs with their Bachelor degree that would qualify for this position. Therefore, we asked our Congress people to co-sponsor this bill and also spoke to them about helping us get a new score from the CBO.

My first visit started at 10:30 AM with Representative Kristi Noem in the Cannon House Office Building. While waiting to meet with Sam Newcomer, her legislative correspondent, Rep. Noem stopped in the hall twice to talk to me while she was trying to rotate between meetings. These people are so busy trying to hear everyone, you must be very patient. I did actually meet with Sam and talked with him about our issues. I managed to get my picture with Rep. Noem.

My second visit was with Senator Tim Johnson's office at 11:30 AM. I have yet to meet our Senator after 3 years of trying. I met with Megan DesCamps, the legislative assistant to discuss our pending issues. She will take our information to the Senator.

My last and final visit of the day was with Senator John Thune at 2:30 PM. Senator Thune is on the Senate Finance Committee which Sam Giordano accompanied me to this important meeting. Unfortunately we were not able to talk with Senator Thune as there was a vote on the Senate floor during our appointment time. We met with Dennis D'Aquila, his legislative correspondent, to discuss our bill HR 941. It was an honor to have Sam with me to talk to Dennis about what we are striving to do, of course the cost \$\$\$\$ is concerning as our Medicare Program is not doing so well financially. Sam needed to go to another meeting, so I stayed a little longer hoping to catch the Senator after the vote. WOW! I felt like this was a secret because as I waited, all of the sudden this gal stood to the side of the doorway and asked very quietly if I was Carleen? I said "yes" and she led me down the hall to a corner room which was Senator Thune's office!!!! I actually got my picture taken with the Senator and it was on his website. Then I received an 8 X 10 signed picture from Senator Thune.

We always meet for a debriefing/sharing of our day with all the PACT representatives. I thought my day was fun and exciting until I heard some of the other stories. We gained 11 new House Co-sponsors for HR 941. Also had 3 Congressman's offices ask the PACT reps from their state to provide detailed "request" they could send over to the CBO for clarification. Congressman Ross is organizing (at the request of the Arkansas Society) a letter to be signed from all the Arkansas House Members to the CBO too!

This was a great "Day" on the hill. We had 349 scheduled Hill meetings, the most ever in the 13 years PACT has done the DC Hill Day. Thank you for the opportunity to represent all the licensed RTs in South Dakota in Washington, DC.

Respectfully submitted,

Carleen Waltner, RRT