

AARC Capitol Hill Day

March 12, 2013

Washington, DC

This year on the hill we had a little sun, lots of wind, and rain. We had the best ever Virtual Lobby week statistics. We had a total of 21,048 total messages sent to our congress people throughout the United States. Last year we only had 12,542 total messages sent. That was a lot of excitement for all of us in DC as we visited our congress people. We knew we had the support of many respiratory therapists back home.

For 2013, a different approach was taken to get recognized by Medicare for the RRT to work in the physician office. A new initiative, "Medicare Respiratory Therapist Access Act", was proposed. This act was designed to cover pulmonary self-management education and training services, to be done by qualified RTs in the physician setting with patients diagnosed with COPD, asthma, pulmonary hypertension, pulmonary fibrosis and cystic fibrosis. This would include educating patients on their disease process, observing and teaching proper inhaler technique, importance of taking home medications as ordered by the physician, recommending flu and pneumonia vaccines, and developing an action plan to help manage their disease. The Accountable Care Act is changing the thinking to focus on patients having a primary physician, care coordination, bundled payments, and medical homes. Primary goal is to prevent readmissions.

I had 3 visits scheduled with our congressional offices. First visit was with Congresswoman Kristi Noem's legislative assistant, Peter Eckrich. As we discussed the proposed RT Access Act, Peter told me that he uses and an inhaler for asthma. I had him demonstrate to me how he uses the MDI. I corrected him and commented that if he could not do the inhaler correctly at his age (very young) then how could the elderly patient be expected to learn the technique at the time of discharge or in the physician office when there is not time for the staff to train the patient.

My second appointment was with Senator Tim Johnson's legislative assistant, Megan DesCamps and research assistant Ashley Raspor. I have met with Megan for each PACT meeting I have attended. Megan believed that Senator Johnson would be interested in co-sponsoring the RT Access Act and to let her know as soon as the bill is assigned a number.

My third appointment was with Senator John Thune's legislative assistant, Jane Lucas. Senator Thune is on the Senate Finance committee and we always have an AARC staff person with us for this appointment. Natalie Napolitano joined me for this meeting. The meeting went well except that Jane continued to bring up the billions of dollars that has been lost by the Medicare program and we continued to talk about the savings from preventing readmissions. Jane said she would talk with the Senator but she could not necessarily say that the Senator would support us. Please take advantage of any opportunities that you have to educate people how important RTs are to their health. Also, if you have any connections to Senator Thune, please share them with me and I would be glad to go with you to his office here in Sioux Falls to discuss the RT Access Act.

Thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity to represent the SDSRC in Washington.

Respectfully submitted by Carleen Waltner, RRT

