

Building Relationships with State Medical and Osteopathic Societies

Lay the Foundation Early and Engage All Members

- *Develop your contacts first.* At your next membership meeting, encourage all members to interact with medical colleagues at hospitals, sports fields, schools, etc. and give the members general talking points. These interactions should be about our professional capabilities and experience, and not requests for specific support, until there is more of a relationship in place.
- *Identify meaningful and influential connections within your membership.* Advise state component members to notify state component leadership of the personal relationships they have with any leaders or influential members in the medical societies. Those members could introduce the elected leaders, and even attend the meeting themselves to assist in initiating and developing the relationship.
- *Identify shared issues or goals.* A good entrée is to identify areas of commonality and ask to discuss those. If the area happens to be pending legislation important to both groups, and you have a lobbyist, he or she could offer to arrange a meeting with representative lobbyists present. Examples would be an insurance reform bill prohibiting retroactive rescission of policies or a bill delineating the required education of limited license radiology techs.

Begin with Leadership-to-Leadership Communication

- *Build parallel external relationships within your leadership hierarchy.* It is important that at least three to four levels of senior leadership build relationships, so that as they move up parallel to each other over a few years, the same faces are known, and relationships are strengthened. Usually these are the president, president elect, vice president, and executive director of the component and the corresponding members of the medical society. These relationships would then continue as new officers come on to the board of directors.
- *Small scale operations are effective too.* If you are working on a smaller scale because your state has fewer officers, no executive director, or no lobbyist, you can be just as effective. Call the colleague and invite him or her to lunch. Discuss in generalities such topics as health-care reform or personal matters until you find a commonality. Don't be afraid to address differences because you may find agreement.
- *Be a go-to expert resource for the profession.* Exchange contact information and offer to be a resource when the colleague has any questions related to foot and ankle care. Always follow-up with a thank you note or e-mail within a few days.
- *Reach out regularly.* Repeat this process in a few months and with representatives of many societies. Soon you will be comfortable in this role. You may find new referral sources for your practice as well.

Encourage Executive Director-to-Executive Director Communications

- *Engage your respective peers at your other state medical societies.* Executive director-to-executive director communication often has a different flavor and has more stability. It is very important to solidify this relationship.

Promote Lobbyist-to-Lobbyist Communications

- *Encourage active conversations.* Lobbyist-to-lobbyist communication can be extremely helpful, as lobbyists discuss issues in an entirely different context. Ask your lobbyist to find shared policy issues that you and the medical society can work on together.

Engage with Specialty Societies

- *Related specialties matter too.* Do not limit your efforts to the state medical or osteopathic societies. Some of the best relationships are with specialty societies that really understand what we do. (e.g., vascular surgeons, endocrinologists and others.)

Outreach with Hospitals

- *Team up with your local hospitals.* Consider working with hospital administrators on projects important to them. Some examples are residency programs, wound care centers for revenue enhancement, or policy and protocol creation required for accreditation. The hospital administrator may then help you build key relationships with other medical staff members as he or she is more familiar with what you do and with you personally.
- *Create public outreach education opportunities.* Hospitals are required to provide a community benefit and many hospitals will host lecture series for the public. Offer to host a foot and ankle health educational lecture and invite colleagues. On the APMA website, you can find customizable Power Point presentations on diabetes, heel pain, and sports medicine to use during your presentation.

Do Not be Discouraged

- In the early stages, you may not receive a positive response, but you must keep trying. If the state society is not willing to work with you, try communicating with the local or county society.
- Remember, this is an ongoing process and cannot be accomplished in one month or even necessarily one year.

Seek Advice and Assistance

- Contact colleagues in other states and ask what worked well for them. Additionally, APMA's Center for Professional Advocacy Advisory Group is available to provide guidance and mentors.
- Apply for a CPA Innovation Grant to help advance your building relationships initiative!

Reap the Benefits

- All of these activities will have the added benefit of enhancing your practice as you will become a better communicator about what you do. While you are working on this, it is working for you.
- Relationship building will take time, but with continued and focused effort, your actions will benefit the entire profession.