

LOBBYING FOR FORMAL RECOGNITION

Advocacy means public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy; the profession or work of a legal advocate. Lobbying means seek to influence (a politician or public official) on an issue. And finally, the most essential part of advocacy is grassroots activities-the common or ordinary people, especially as contrasted with the leadership or elite of a political party, social organization-the rank and file. Grassroots is what makes advocacy work for the profession of optometry.

The national optometric association of every country, if allowed legally, should be the advocating body for the profession. The issues should be defined by the association and all the talking points for each issue should also be laid out. The need for a single message is critical and the association can accomplish this. The association should also be responsible for educating the interested doctors of optometry how to advocate and the importance of grassroots advocacy.

Grassroots starts on a local level, even if it involves national issues and politics. National leaders are raised and campaign locally in most countries (other countries are going to have to modify the approach depending on the governmental system). Meet the candidates at local events and be ready to donate money, time or supplies for the campaign. Besides money, donate time to canvas parts of town with signs and flyers or donate supplies like paper/pens/etc. Introduce yourself and educate the candidate what you do for THEIR constituents and how important it is to quality of life. Discuss the issues quickly that affect the profession, but come from the side of benefitting the patient and NOT the profession. Example, increasing scope of practice will benefit the patient by saving time, travel and cost to the patient and healthcare system. When talking give personal examples from your office about your patients and how the issues affect them directly. You will need to attend several events to get personal.

In certain countries that have elected legislative bodies, this is where doctors must do grassroots work to know the legislator. Doing this work and if the candidate is successful, the doctor can be remembered and potentially have more influence with the legislator. You must try to be involved with more than just optometric issues to keep your influence from diminishing. When dealing with the office, do not be disappointed when staff meet you or take your phone calls. They have the direct line to their boss. Have professional materials, prepared by the national association, to be given and left behind with the legislator. Most communications after face to face is with staff. S

In office meetings with political officials, there are several items you should do to be successful. First, know about the official. Second, know the issues very well and keep it short when presenting. Third, give a personal story or two about your patients that shows the benefit to their constituents. Fourth, always tell the truth and answers inquiries truthful. Fifth, offer to be an expert contact to the office. Last, make sure to do "The Ask" for support. If you cannot answer a question, do not make up response, but offer to get back with a response.

In countries without legislators, then most issues will have to go through the Ministry of Health or Department of Health. To develop a personal relationship at this level will be difficult but can be done. It will be longer to develop a personal relationship. A search to find a doctor who knows the official/administrator, will be hard to find so one may have to start from ground level. It will take a special person to take on this task.

So, when it comes to passing issues, in a legislative government, the national association needs to find a sponsor initially who will carry the proposed legislation. The sponsor may then, using staff try to sign on other sponsors. Doctors meeting with legislators can do the same at the end of each meeting asking the legislator to support the issue. In an administrator only government, the national association needs to find, like stated before, a doctor and staff who can meet the Minister of Health(example) to discuss the importance and impact of the issue.

Again, depending on the countries laws, the national association can set up a Political Action Committee (PAC) where individual doctors give money, not surpassing the legal amount set by law. These funds can then be given to different campaigns to help get the friends of the profession get elected. Money can help the profession get in the door. Finance laws must be understood first.

Remember, to be effective, the relationship must be long term thus having continuity. Commit to long term relationship. The message, by the national association, must be presented consistently uniform. Always tell the truth about the issues and talk about their constituents, your patients, and the benefit the issue will have on them. Be willing to be involved with the politician and willing to meet anywhere at anytime. Also remember the staff can be huge allies, so know them very personally. They are easier to reach and also have direct contact to their boss. Always at the end of a meeting do "The Ask" for their support and where do they stand on the issue. Remember follow up is essential via phone or email. You need to keep the issue in front of them, but do not become a pest! Be realistic on the follow up.

Golden Rules

1. Don't underestimate public officials
2. Don't look down on government and politics
3. Be understanding
4. Be friendly
5. Be reasonable
6. Be thoughtful
7. Don't blame public officials for "failing" to do what you wanted
8. Be cooperative
9. Be realistic
10. Be practical
11. Be a good opponent
12. Be informed
13. Learn to evaluate and weigh issues
14. Don't break a promise
15. Don't change your position in the middle of the stream

The longer you stay involved, the better you will get at interacting with any public official.

Know the complete process to get a bill passed into law before any action.

Possible additions patient letters and social media

