

I was one of the urology residents selected to participate in the AUA advocacy summit this year and I wanted to share some thoughts about my experience.

To be honest, I was initially a little nervous about participating in the summit. I had never participated in advocacy of any kind before and while I knew who my elected representatives were (VT, Sen. Sanders, Sen. Leahy, Rep. Welch), the idea of advocating on behalf of the AUA and speaking to my elected representatives about topics important to our patients and our organization was never something I thought I could do. What do I say to these elected officials? How do I go about organizing my “elevator speech” to advocate efficiently and clearly? How do we even get to their offices?

Thankfully, there was lots of support, passion, guidance from AUA leadership and experienced urology advocates who had participated in this process before. I learned how to structure my presentations for maximal effectiveness and clarity, how to network with political staff, the best way to navigate the Capitol buildings, and the nature of political etiquette and lexicon. I walked away from the teaching portions of the summit more reassured about speaking to my senators and representatives about important issues affecting our ability to provide care to our patients – and it showed!

The walking day of the advocacy summit was also exciting. We spent time exploring the buildings and appreciating the beautiful architecture in between our appointments – something I thoroughly enjoyed as I had never even been inside the Capitol buildings before. With the help of Dr. Brian Irwin, one of the physician mentors on the team, we were able to present our positions in a concise and logical manner to a group of liaisons and staff members who were receptive and understanding of the AUA’s concerns. The teaching sessions from the day prior helped me contribute to the conversation in a real, meaningful way and I was able to articulate our “asks” efficiently. The staffers must have been impressed with our presentation because at the end of the meeting, we even got to ride the underground Capitol subway system (it’s usually restricted to Capitol staff only!)

Overall, I had a wonderful time and felt I was able to make a difference for our patients and our organization. I hope to participate again next year and I’m looking forward to networking with AUA leaders, sharing my own experiences, and working together with other residents in order to better advocate for causes important to our patients and to our specialty!

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