KEY COMMUNICATIONS COMPONENTS

Given their hectic schedules, Members of Congress are organized in how they review issues. First of all, their focus is on policy impact on constituents. Policymakers and their staff welcome constituent opinions on policy issues because they represent votes, but also because opinions personify policy impact. Members of Congress and their staff receive massive amounts of information, so they look for clear policy messages, to-the-point rationale, supportive data, and personal stories. In today's economy, financial considerations are always on the minds of policymakers so when you can, reference cost savings and how the policy helps patients. It is critical to care about what your leaders care about as you are competing to be memorable amidst thousands of other advocates communicating opinions. Regardless of how you communicate with your policymakers, there are four key components:

1. **Describe the “Constituent” Connection:** You have the power to help determine whether your policymakers will be elected to Congress. It may be hard to believe but it’s true: voting constituents have a great deal of influence in how policies are developed because, as a voter, you give your policymakers their job. Emphasize you are a constituent.

2. **Explain the Pertinence of Your Role to the Issue:** If you are a patient, explain how the proposed healthcare issue impacts your healthcare. If you are a student pharmacist, explain how a proposed policy is harmful or beneficial to pharmacy, and your future as a healthcare professional. If you are a pharmacist, educate your audience about the value of pharmacy and how a proposal could damage or help your ability to provide your patients with quality healthcare. Executives might explain how a bill would impact customers, patients, and employees. If applicable, explain your professional title, business name, company physical location, people employed, taxes paid and patients served.

3. **Concisely Share Issue Concerns:** If at all possible, limit the number of issues discussed in one communication, regardless of communication type. Your communication should establish you are a constituent, demonstrate your role in the community, and the key issue at hand. This concise targeting ensures your opinions are placed into “context.” Always talk about how the issue will directly impact your life, and if you work with a company providing healthcare services, other constituent lives. Remember, when you do talk about your role and the issue, do not use lingo like “MTM” as not everyone understands pharmacy jargon.

4. **Include a Formal “Ask” and Thank You:** One of the biggest reasons why lawmakers do not assist is because they have never been asked. Always incorporate your “ask” into your communication. It is important to clearly state what you would like the lawmaker to do on your behalf. This will ensure there are no questions about what you are trying to accomplish. Regardless of the immediate or ultimate outcome, it is important to express gratitude for the opportunity to communicate your opinions. Be certain to let your lawmaker and their staff know you will be sharing the results of your request with your colleagues, staff and patients if applicable.

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