

National Orthopaedic Leadership Conference 2008  
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The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons held the National Orthopaedic Leadership Conference (NOLC) on April 30 – May 3, 2008. For the last 25 years, this annual meeting has consisted of over 200 orthopaedic surgeons representing the AAOS Board of Directors and Board of Councilors; the Board of Specialty Societies; the Leadership Fellows Program; the PAC Executive Committee; and orthopaedic state societies.

I was fortunate enough to serve as the Pennsylvania Orthopaedic Society (POS) resident representative. Also in attendance from the Pittsburgh area were Dr. Jeffrey Baum (AAOS Board of Councilors and past President of POS) and Dr. Thomas Hughes (Board of Specialty Societies). Several large issues were addressed; at the forefront was the Medicare payment formula and support of the AAOS Bill (Access to America's Orthopaedic Services Act).

The NOLC is unlike many other orthopaedic conferences, as it consisted of AAOS leadership, Orthopaedic PAC leadership and individual state leadership. We participated in a variety of educational briefings in preparation for visits with Senators and Representatives of the House. We also heard from such speakers as Newt Gingrich (former Speaker of the House), Brian Day, MD (President of the Canadian Medical Association), Governor George Allen (R-VA), Stuart Weinstein MD (Chairman of Orthopaedic PAC and past President of AAOS) and Anthony Rankin MD (President of the AAOS).

As most of you know, Medicare patients are facing a medical emergency. Their access to specialty care (and primary care) is at risk. At the time of print, Medicare physician payment rates are slated to be reduced by 10.6 percent in July 2008 under current law. A series of short term fixes to Medicare's Sustainable Growth Rate Formula (SGR) – the reimbursement program for physicians – has failed to address the medical realities facing specialty physicians every day. The 2007 Medicare Trustees Report predicts a series of reductions in Medicare physician payment rates over the next 8 years. During this same time period, practice costs are estimated to increase 18%. A recent AMA survey (n=8,955) found that if this proposed cut goes into effect, 60% of physicians would have to limit the number of new Medicare patients they treat under proposed cuts.

The AAOS has helped to draft a very specific orthopaedic bill Access to America's Orthopaedic Services Act. The bill addresses musculoskeletal diseases and conditions in the United States, including such issues as aging, pediatrics and trauma. This legislation has major cosponsors (Democrats and Republicans) in the U.S. House of Representatives. During the NOLC, we urged members in the House and the Senate to become original cosponsors of this legislation.

The NOLC had an entire day reserved for lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. We had personal visits with Representative Jason Altmire (D-4<sup>th</sup>), Joe Sestak (D-7<sup>th</sup>) and Mike Doyle (D-14<sup>th</sup>). We also had the privilege to meet with Senator Arlen Specter (R) and a representative from the office of Senator Robert Casey, Jr.'s (D). These meetings served to be educational, enjoyable and exciting. It was an opportunity to exercise our civic rights and have our voice heard. Currently, there are two Orthopaedic surgeons in Congress; Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) and Representative Tom Price (R-GA), both of whom were attendees of the meeting the prior year.

Being politically active has not traditionally been a part of the physician culture. But in order to achieve the health policy advocacy agenda for ourselves and our patients, time and effort need to be applied.

NOTE TO PUBLISHER \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1: "NOLC1" Caption: "Drs. Baum and Perricelli on Capitol Hill"

Figure 2: "NOLC2" Caption: "Drs. Perricelli MD, Anthony Rankin MD (President AAOS), John Gill MD, (Chair – AAOS Board of Councilors) and Senator John Barrasso MD (R-WY)

Figure 3: "NOLC3" Caption: "Dr. Baum, Brett and Julie at Nationals Park watching the Pirates Win"