

How-to: Congressional Visits

1) Plan Your Meeting

Decide whether you are going alone or as a group. If a group, decide on roles, who will lead the meeting, and a note taker. Plan 2-3 points that get at the heart of your position. Know what you're asking for, and why it should be important to the elected official. Everyone should have a speaking role. Be prepared for common opposition arguments. Assume 30 minutes. Allow time for dialog.

2) Know Your Audience

Do a little research on the policy maker you are meeting with. Try to get an understanding on how they may have voted on similar issues in the past. DFA can help you find this information. Research the district to understand the population, and who may be important to the official.

3) Begin the Meeting on Common Ground

Small talk, but keep it brief. Thank them for the good votes they've taken in the past. Perhaps you live in the same town or share the same sports team. Find clues in the office or from news stories.

4) Define Your Message and Tell Your Story

Stick with one or two compelling facts, and a rebuttal of the single most common opposition argument. Concentrate mostly on powerful stories. Share your personal experience and those of the members of the group. Touch the mind AND heart of the legislator. Remember that you are an expert in providing patient care. Your story is that of a patient or family in need.

5) State the Reason for Your Visit: "The Ask"

Small talk, but keep it brief. Thank them for the good votes they've taken in the past. Perhaps you live in the same town or share the same sports team. Find clues in the office or from news stories.

6) Invite Comments and Questions

Engage in a dialogue. This will make it easier to educate the legislator on the issues in general and your issue in particular. Aim for them to be talking 40-50% of the time—but try to maintain control of the conversation.

7) Ask for Commitment

If you do not ask for something, you will not get it! If the policy maker or their staff demur, ask when they'll have an answer, and what else they need to help them make their decision. Schedule a time to be back in touch for follow up and to provide more information that may have arisen from the dialogue.

8) Have a Leave Behind

If possible, have a one page piece of written information with a few key facts and your request. Make sure that the leave behind includes your name and contact information.

9) Follow Up

Send a thank you note, either hand-written or email. Be sure to answer any questions that your legislator/staffer has. Try to schedule either a follow up meeting, or, invite them to visit your clinic office or hospital.