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In This Issue



ASTRO members advocate on Capitol Hill

Radiation oncologists from around the country convened on Capitol Hill for ASTRO's 13th annual Advocacy Day this May to discuss ASTRO's 2016 legislative priorities with members of Congress.



ASTRO goes to Washington

Nearly 100 ASTRO members, including radiation oncologists, residents, physicists, administrators and nurses from 34 states met at this year's Advocacy Day.



Society of Chairs of Academic Radiation Oncology Programs

The Society of Chairs of Academic Radiation Oncology Programs (SCAROP) held its Annual Meeting this May in Washington, D.C., and discussed a range of topics.



PAC dinner held

ASTRO's Political Action Committee (ASTRO PAC) hosted its annual donor appreciation dinner with special guest Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.).



Health Policy Fellowship

In April, ASTRO announced the inaugural class of its Health Policy Fellowship. Four individuals were selected for this competitive, year-long program.



ASTRO leaders discuss Advocacy Day

Listen to radio interviews with ASTRO leaders from radio stations around the country.

VOLUME 19 • SPECIAL EDITION

ASTRO news

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR RADIATION ONCOLOGY

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ASTRO members advocate on Capitol Hill

*ASTROnews shadows New York group
for fly-in day in Washington, D.C.*

BY ERIN L. BOYLE, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Approximately 100 ASTRO members from around the country convened on Capitol Hill for ASTRO's 13th Annual Advocacy Day on May 24, visiting the offices of senators and members of the House of Representatives to discuss ASTRO's 2016 legislative priorities.

Among those ASTRO members were four from the state of New York: Peter B. Schiff, MD, PhD, FASTRO, professor, department of radiation oncology, NYU School of Medicine; Samuel M. Shin, MD, PGY-5, NYU School of Medicine; George M. Uschold, EdD, department of radiation oncology, director of operations, associate professor, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York; and Joanna Yang, MD, PGY-3, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. They visited the offices of Sen. Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY), Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-NY-0), Rep. Eliot L. Engel (D-NY-16), Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY-16) and Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-25) as both constituents and radiation oncologists, providing information about the field and its current advocacy priorities.

ASTROnews followed the group for the day on Capitol Hill, where they spoke to Congressional staffers in hallways, conference rooms and offices. While some ASTRO members met with members of Congress themselves, many met with their staffers, who gather and deliver constituent information to their bosses. Some staffers are experts on various topics, including health care and health advocacy. At each stop, the four ASTRO members from New York shared what they had learned on May 23 at the day of briefing on the Society's four main legislative priorities:

- Preserve access to care through stable Medicare payments and alternative payment models
- Promote delivery and payment system reform by ending self-referral abuse
- Increase investments in radiation oncology research
- Preserve and increase funding and residency slots for graduate medical education

Continued on next page

PICTURED ON THE LEFT: FOUR ASTRO MEMBERS FROM NEW YORK DISCUSS THE SOCIETY'S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES.



PICTURED ABOVE: FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, PETER B. SCHIFF, MD, PHD, FASTRO; JOANNA YANG, MD; SAMUEL M. SHIN, MD; AND GEORGE M. USCHOLD, EDD.

Why they were there

Dr. Schiff has attended nearly every ASTRO Advocacy Day since its inception in 2003. Dr. Shin was accompanying him for a second time; Drs. Uschold and Yang were taking part for the first time.

“I decided to come to Advocacy Day to learn more about ASTRO’s efforts in D.C. and to get involved early on in my career,” Dr. Yang said. “The health policy landscape is changing, and I think it’s important for me as a resident to understand these changes and how they will affect our field.”

Dr. Shin said research continues to show the complexities of the field of oncology. Radiation oncology is on the forefront of innovation, and it shouldn’t be forgotten for other modalities.

“I’m here today to show my support for the organization and to try to ensure a better environment for not only current radiation oncologists, but also future radiation oncologists,” he said. “I want to ensure we have a voice, and can further provide a platform for us not only in D.C., but elsewhere in the country.”

Radiation oncology runs in Dr. Uschold’s family—his father-in-law was radiation oncology pioneer Phillip Rubin, MD, FASTRO, and his wife and daughter are also radiation therapists. He attended Advocacy Day this year to raise awareness about radiation therapy.

“I want to try to get the word out there that radiation oncologists do a good job of managing and caring for our cancer patients. We need to highlight the successes of the profession, and also the costs of cancer. Radiation oncology can be much more cost-effective than three or four chemo regimens. The cost of drugs are not sustainable, and for long-term care, radiation gets the win.”

While walking between offices on Capitol Hill, he said it was refreshing to see residents in their different years, including Drs. Shin and Yang, taking part in the day.

“I started in the field in 1974,” he said. “It’s nice to see these young residents carrying it forward.”



PICTURED ABOVE: THE ASTRO MEMBERS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK SPOKE ABOUT ASTRO’S PRIORITIES IN A CONGRESSWOMAN’S OFFICE AT ASTRO’S FLY-IN.

What they discussed


Each ASTRO member from New York spoke about a different ASTRO legislative priority to Congressional staffers. Dr. Schiff opened the discussions with an overview of radiation oncology, asking aides if they knew what a radiation oncologist does.

“It’s a great alternative to surgery,” he told the staff in Sen. Schumer’s office. “It can also be a great curative option for treatment for select lung cancer patients’ early stage disease.”

Dr. Uschold outlined preserving access to care through stable Medicare payments and alternative payment models. Dr. Shin discussed ending self-referral abuse. Dr. Yang presented the importance of increasing investments in radiation oncology research. She told a story about a young patient with an aggressive form of cancer who died from the disease. She said this patient inspired her to learn more about the molecular profile of her patient’s specific disease and sequence her tumor. However, whole exome sequencing is expensive and costs about \$1,000 per sample, which demonstrates the continued need for cancer research funding.

Both Drs. Shin and Yang discussed preserving and increasing funding and residency slots for graduate medical education. As a resident, Dr. Yan said that Advocacy Day was a “valuable experience.”

“I learned a great deal, including that radiation oncology research only represented 2.2 percent of the NCI budget in FY2015. Radiation oncologists see over 80 percent of all cancer patients at some point in their treatment, so that incongruity emphasized for me how important it is for ASTRO to continue to build its presence in D.C.,” she said.

“I’m looking forward to coming back next year and bringing some of my co-residents.” 

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THIS YEAR, NEARLY 100 ASTRO MEMBERS ATTENDED THE 13TH ANNUAL ADVOCACY DAY EVENT.

ASTRO goes to Washington

ASTRO members take part in 13th Annual Advocacy Day

On May 24, ASTRO hosted its 13th annual Advocacy Day. Nearly 100 ASTRO members including radiation oncologists, residents, physicists, administrators and nurses representing 34 states met with representatives and their staff to educate them on ASTRO's legislative priorities.

The event kicked off on Monday, May 23, with a variety of sessions designed to update members on key issues and prepare them for the following day's Congressional visits. An orientation session helped first-time participants understand what to expect during their Hill meetings. Keynote speaker Wendell Primus, the current senior policy advisor to House Democratic Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA-12), discussed the political landscape impacting health care in Congress. ASTRO's Chair, Bruce D. Minsky, MD, FASTRO, highlighted ways to appropriately and effectively engage federal agencies and Congress on regulatory and legislative threats and opportunities. Attendees also learned about how ASTRO's efforts on payment reform aligned

with the passage of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) of 2015, which repealed the antiquated sustainable growth rate (SGR) physician payment formula. Each session featured a lively question and answer period, which allowed for interaction with speakers.

This year's Advocacy Day focused on four main legislative priorities: (1) to invest in cancer research with sustainable and predictable funding; (2) to protect patients' access to quality health care by stabilizing Medicare payments while pursuing innovative models of physician reimbursement; (3) by ending physician self-referral abuse; and (4) to preserve funding and residency slots for graduate medical education. ASTRO members also used meetings as an opportunity to thank their legislators for recent support against payment cuts to the specialty.

"As important as it is to raise awareness of our legislative priorities with policymakers, we consider it just as important to thank them for supporting


radiation oncology,” said Dave Adler, ASTRO’s vice-president of Advocacy. Due in part to radiation oncology’s Congressional champions, reimbursement reductions in the final 2016 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) were less severe than originally proposed. Moreover, the Patient Access and Medicare Protection Act (S. 2425), passed in December, froze payment rates for freestanding radiation oncology centers through 2018 at the levels set under the 2016 MPFS. This ASTRO-supported legislation brought freestanding centers some much-needed payment stability.

Adler and Stephanie Quinn, assistant director of congressional relations at ASTRO, presented the legislative priorities as well as the current political landscape in Washington to help attendees understand the hurdles that advocates must overcome to be successful.

“Members of Congress need to hear from their constituents to ensure that they are effectively representing our needs in Washington. Advocacy Day should be an ongoing dialogue with members of Congress that continues when you are back home,” said Quinn.

The following day, ASTRO hosted a lunch for attendees in the Rayburn House Office Building, which served as an opportunity to fuel up between meetings while hearing from members of Congress on relevant House committees. Congressman Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), an ASTRO legislative champion,

joined the group and discussed several issues facing the House Ways and Means Committee. Following his remarks, House Energy and Commerce member Paul Tonko (D-NY) addressed the group. In the fall of 2015, Rep. Tonko, along with Rep. Devin Nunes (R-CA) and Sens. Richard Burr (R-NC) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), led the bipartisan response to proposed Medicare payment cuts that included obtaining support from 207 members of Congress. The support letters called particular attention to the burden that community-based clinics would face by losing the payment stability that is essential to ensure accessible, affordable care for their patients. Rep. Tonko’s address to the Advocacy Day group underscored the importance of engaging with members of Congress and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as MACRA implementation unfolds, and he reiterated his interest in remaining vigilant that the law reflects Congressional intent.

Overall, ASTRO’s 2016 Advocacy Day provided an opportunity for members to network, learn about the political and policy pressures that continue to face the specialty, and strengthen ties between attendees and their members of Congress. As noted by an attendee, “I was glad to be a part of this and hope to be able to participate on a regular basis to help inform Congress and others of the important role that radiation oncology plays in the treatment of cancer.” 

PICTURED ON BOTTOM LEFT: ASTRO CHAIR BRUCE D. MINSKY, MD, FASTRO, AND DAVE ADLER, ASTRO'S VICE-PRESIDENT OF ADVOCACY
PICTURED ON BOTTOM RIGHT: PRESIDENT DAVID C. BEYER, MD, FASTRO



Society of Chairs of Academic Radiation Oncology Programs

holds Annual Meeting ahead of Advocacy Day



STEPHEN HAHN, MD, FASTRO, PRESENTED SILVIA FORMENTI, MD, WITH A PLAQUE IN RECOGNITION OF HER SERVICE AS CHAIR OF SCAROP.

The Society of Chairs of Academic Radiation Oncology Programs (SCAROP) held its Annual Meeting this May in Washington, D.C., featuring speakers discussing a range of topics including new opportunities at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), a survey looking at women and minorities in leadership roles in radiation oncology and updates from four ASTRO Councils.

Stephen Hahn, MD, FASTRO, opened the meeting, introducing the first two speakers from the NCI: Eric J. Bernhard, chief, Radiotherapy Development Branch, Radiation Research Program (RRP), Division of Cancer Treatment and Diagnosis (DCTD) and Charles Kunos, MD, PhD, medical officer, Investigational Drug Branch, Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program, Division of Cancer Treatment and Diagnosis. Both speakers touched on Vice President Joe Biden's recent announcement of a Cancer Moonshot Initiative.

"It's important that radiation oncologists take part in the Moonshot Initiative," Dr. Bernhard said. "I would hope that SCAROP and ASTRO would

weigh in on what's important to our community, or else we'll miss out on this opportunity." He asked attendees to take part by visiting this website and suggesting research ideas by June 30: <https://cancerresearchideas.cancer.gov>.

Dr. Bernhard also presented information about the NCI's allocation in the 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act, and the funding of radiation therapy-related grants. Dr. Bernhard underscored the importance of each chair's support for his or her young clinician scientists in this difficult funding period. In addition, he encouraged radiation oncologists to apply for grants, as well as to become reviewers. "ASTRO and the Radiation Research Program have made concerted efforts to increase the number of people in radiation oncology in the review panels. If you're a chair and have people who would be good reviewers and don't have people on our study section, please send them our way," he said.

Dr. Kunos, the first radiation oncologist to be a staff member of the NCI's Cancer Therapy Evaluation Program, addressed the barriers that junior researchers often face, including the lack of time to focus on different areas of research projects, lack of funding, lack of research staff and lack of mentorship. "We need to strengthen that relationship as much as we can," he said.

Following the NCI presentation, a discussion on radiation oncologist workforce issues was held, with Lindsay Burt, MD, giving an overview from Association of Residents in Radiation Oncology (ARRO), and Robert E. Harbaugh, MD, discussing the topic from the viewpoint of his position as the president of the Society of Neurological Surgeons. Ben Smith, MD, provided an update on his projections about workforce needs, and Kaled M. Alektiar, MD, presented the issue from the American Board of Radiology's perspective.

That discussion was followed by a presentation by Reshma Jagsi, MD, DPhil, who discussed “Gender, Race and the Experiences of Chairs of Academic Radiation Oncology Departments.” She said that Christin H. Chapman, MD, and colleagues have done some of the best research on this topic in their study “Diversity Based on Race, Ethnicity, and Sex, of the U.S. Radiation Oncology Physician Workforce,” published in the *International Journal of Radiation Oncology • Biology • Physics* in 2012. They found that minorities and women are underrepresented in radiation oncology. Women represent nearly half of the medical student body now, but have remained about a third or fewer of the radiation oncology population. From her own count, of the 93 current chairs of U.S. academic radiation oncology, 82 are males, 11 are females and three are under-represented minorities (URM). She said that the field of radiation oncology would benefit from a better understanding of department chairs’ experiences as well as the unique challenges that women and URMs seeking leadership positions face in the field, so she is leading a study on the topic.

“What we don’t know is how race and gender are related to the personal and career experiences of leaders in radiation oncology,” Dr. Jagsi said. “One aim of this study is to explore the personal and career experiences of chairs before and after assuming their chair positions.”

The other aims are evaluating whether gender differences exist and to generate generalizable insights, including in the experiences of URMs and women candidate in influential positions. The study is looking at the lessons learned and the highs/lows and joys/disappointments in the daily professional lives of those interviewed. The interviews will be conducted using JAMA guidelines for qualitative research and will continue until thematic saturation.

Twenty-five chairs have been invited to take the anonymous telephone survey, of whom:

- Twenty-two have agreed to participate
- Fourteen have already been interviewed
- Twelve are female, three are under-represented minorities


She encouraged everyone who receives a survey to take part, and thanked those who have taken it.

In an update of ASTRO Council activities, three council chairs and a vice-chair spoke: Mike Kuettel, MD, PhD, MBA, FASTRO, Health Policy chair; Dan Low, PhD, Science vice-chair; Lawrence B. Marks, MD, FASTRO, Clinical Affairs and Quality chair; and Geraldine M. Jacobson, MD, MBA, MPH, FASTRO, Government Relations chair.

Dr. Kuettel discussed the [Health Policy Fellowship](#), a new program to provide exposure to health policy reimbursement and coding activities and develop the next generation of ASTRO health policy leaders. The program gives fellows a year-long learning opportunity, including a day-long education program and engagement in the CPT and RUC processes. Four physicians were selected in April.

Dr. Low discussed the many projects that the Science Council supports, such as the science workshops in collaboration with the NCI and the American Association of Physicists in Medicine, ASTRO awards and ASTRO’s mentorship program. Dr. Marks gave an update on the Accreditation Program for Excellence® (APEX): there have been 55 applications, five facility visits conducted, five facilities accredited, 11 facility visits in process of scheduling and 125 surveyors approved. He also discussed ASTRO’s nine guidelines published, 10 additional in process and three National Comprehensive Cancer Network guidelines evaluated, as well as presented an overview on the current status of RO-ILS: Radiation Oncology Incident Learning System®.

For Dr. Jacobson, it was a time to celebrate the progress made in the government relations field, including the repeal of the SGR and bipartisan budget increases to support NIH/NCI funding. “You could think that every year we don’t make progress, and face the same things, but our advocacy DOES make a difference,” she said.

Other information presented at the meeting included results of an emotional intelligence survey and the National Resident Matching Program from Charles Thomas, MD; a look at the International Cancer Expert Corps from Silvia Formenti, MD; and an overview of open access journals and ASTRO’s new offering in the field, *Advances in Radiation Oncology*, from editor-in-chief, Robert C. Miller, MD, FASTRO. 



SEN. BURR SPEAKS TO ASTRO PAC DONORS AT THE DINNER, HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 13TH ANNUAL ASTRO ADVOCACY DAY.

PAC dinner held *during ASTRO 13th Advocacy Day*

Following the day's sessions, ASTRO's Political Action Committee (ASTRO PAC) hosted its annual donor appreciation dinner. ASTRO PAC, created in 2003, helps ASTRO more actively participate in government and helps ensure members' issues are heard by policymakers. This year, Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) served as the honored dinner guest and shared with the group why he's led Congressional efforts to protect access to radiation oncology treatments, the current state of health care and potential reforms that Republicans may propose to repeal the Affordable Care Act. The senator's remarks were witty and characteristically candid

and highlighted the continuing need for ASTRO to engage members of Congress on the issues that are important to the specialty.

ASTRO PAC had 366 contributors who donated \$165,455 in 2015. During this year's Advocacy Day alone, ASTRO PAC received more than \$30,000 in contributions. ASTRO PAC uses its contributions to support, in a bipartisan way, senators and representatives whose positions are aligned with ASTRO priorities. The dinner also provided a chance for residents, newer ASTRO members, and ASTRO veterans alike to gather and informally discuss issues facing the field. [A](#)

ASTRO welcomes *inaugural class of Health Policy Fellows*

BY PRIYA LAMBA, ESQ, MEDICARE POLICY MANAGER

In April, ASTRO announced the inaugural class of its Health Policy Fellowship program. Four individuals were selected for this competitive, year-long program, which provides education and training for future ASTRO leaders on radiation oncology coding, reimbursement and payment reform issues.

The inaugural class of Fellows includes four board-certified radiation oncologists representing both academic and community-based settings. Additionally, all have a history of involvement in health policy work, namely with coding and reimbursement issues. The 2016 ASTRO Health Policy Fellows are:

- **Aileen B. Chen, MD, MPP**, a senior physician in thoracic oncology at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and assistant professor of radiation oncology at Harvard Medical School, both in Boston. Dr. Chen currently serves on ASTRO's Code Development and Valuation Subcommittee and is involved with ASTRO's Payment Reform Workgroup.
- **Gregg E. Franklin, MD, PhD**, the clinical director of radiation oncology at the New Mexico Cancer Center in Albuquerque. Dr. Franklin has been a member of ASTRO's Government Relations Committee and Code Development and Valuation Subcommittee for several years.
- **Amar Rewari, MD, MBA**, a radiation oncologist at the Shady Grove Adventist Radiation Oncology Center in Rockville, Maryland. Dr. Rewari served for several years on ASTRO's Payer Relations Subcommittee.
- **Catheryn M. Yashar, MD**, an associate professor specializing in breast radiation oncology at the University of California, San Diego. Dr. Yashar is a member of ASTRO's Code Development and Valuation Subcommittee.

On May 21, 2016, the Health Policy Fellows attended a day-long orientation in Washington, D.C., where they received an in-depth primer on the different components of health policy from ASTRO's health policy staff and current health policy leadership, including David C. Beyer, MD, FASTRO; Thomas Eichler, MD, FASTRO; Corbin Johnson, MD; Michael Kuettel, MD, PhD, MBA, FASTRO; and Najeeb Mohideen, MD, FASTRO. The orientation kicked off with an overview of the American Medical Association's Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) Editorial Panel process and requirements for creating and revising existing CPT codes. This included a deep dive into the review of the CPT code change proposal (CCP) application, which requires a definition of the service, including a detailed description of the work, adoption and utilization data, as well as literature supporting the clinical efficacy of the service for which a code is being requested. The orientation then proceeded to cover the complexities of the American Medical Association's Relative Value Scale Update Committee (RUC) process through which CPT codes obtain a value that is used to determine the reimbursement rate. This included a review of the technical and professional components of CPT codes and the importance of RUC survey data.


The Fellows then spent time reviewing Medicare Physician Fee Schedule (MPFS) and Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS) issues, including site-of-service and recent developments involving conventional radiation therapy and image-guidance codes. The orientation wrapped up with ASTRO's coding education efforts and an overview of the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization (MACRA) Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) and Alternative Payment Models (APMs) programs' proposed rule.

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After the orientation, the Fellows spent the next two days attending ASTRO's annual Code Development and Valuation Subcommittee fly-in meeting also held in Washington, D.C. The Fellows, using the knowledge they learned from the orientation, actively participated and engaged in detailed discussions on current radiation oncology CPT, RUC, coding issues and questions that ASTRO is actively addressing. The Health Policy Fellows demonstrated a keen interest in the different facets of health policy issues, and ASTRO looks forward to continuing their training and involvement in ASTRO's health policy activities.

In the upcoming year, the Fellows will attend the CPT and RUC meetings, where they will be able to observe and apply the knowledge and skills they are receiving as part of their education and training. The Fellows will also participate on projects related to Medicare and third-party payer reimbursement, including the annual MPFS and OPFS proposed and final rules analysis, as well as the development of ASTRO's alternative payment models.


ASTRO will solicit applications for the 2017 Health Policy Fellowship program in early 2017. 

ASTRO leaders discuss Advocacy Day and legislative priorities with radio stations around the country

As part of this year's Advocacy Day, members of ASTRO's leadership spoke with radio stations across the country to outline the Society's legislative priorities and highlight ASTRO's support for increased cancer research funding.

ASTRO President David C. Beyer, MD, FASTRO; Government Relations Council Chair Geraldine M. Jacobson, MD, MBA, MPH, FASTRO; President-elect Brian Kavanagh, MD, MPH, FASTRO; Government Relations Vice-chair Howard M. Sandler, MD, MS, FASTRO; ASTRO Clinical Affairs and Quality Council Chair

Lawrence B. Marks, MD, FASTRO; and former Chair Tim Williams, MD, FASTRO, took part in audio releases, taped discussions or on-air interviews with stations in their home states and beyond. Their interviews reached more than 23.6 million listeners in the U.S., and two interview were featured on stations with national audiences.

Listen to several radio interviews with Drs. Beyer, Williams and Sandler [here](#). Or click on the red arrow buttons on the photos below to listen to interviews with each pictured physician: Dr. Beyer, Dr. Williams and Dr. Sandler. 



Photos from Advocacy Day



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