

Debut of RIMS' "Civics for Doctors" seminar gets good reviews



Rhode Island's junior US Senator Sheldon Whitehouse delivers the keynote for the new RIMS/RIMPAC seminar for doctors, "Getting (More) Involved 101" on March 10.

RIMS' first offering of a new seminar on politics and public policy drew over forty Rhode Island physicians on March 10 and garnered gratifying evaluations. Enrollees of "Getting (More) Involved 101" said they came away impressed that they, as individual citizens, can make a difference politically with a handshake, a phone call or mouse-click.

Offered under the motto "Democracy is not a Spectator Sport," the half-day seminar was arranged and offered by RIMS and RIMPAC in response to wishes expressed by Medical Society members last fall in the context of RIMS' long-range planning process. (Members had praised the established RIMS/RIMPAC seminar offered biennially on how to run for public office, but they saw an unfulfilled need for political education designed for a broader physician audience.)

In a first-ever such collaboration between RIMS and NORCAL, the ACCME-accredited mutual insurance company provided CME credit for participants in the seminar.

The faculty for the workshop included U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse offering the keynote; national and local consultants in public relations and politics; RIMS President-Elect, the Honorable K. Nicholas Tsiongas, MD, MPH; RIMS Public Laws Committee Chairman Michael Migliori, MD; and RIMPAC Chair L. Anthony Cirillo, MD.

Seminar participants were treated to a crash course in the structure and terminology of the Rhode Island General Assembly and a list of do's and don'ts in communicating with lawmakers. (Do be concise and stick to the facts. Don't make threats or use vulgar language.) The day's theme underscored the seminar's purpose: politics is the engine that drives policy.

In his keynote, Rhode Island's junior U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse warned, "The next few years will determine how you practice medicine for generations to come." Whitehouse implored physicians to look beyond issues that affect only certain specialties and think about the future of their shared profession. Whitehouse expressed disappointment that "almost every time I hear back from a physician, it involves some billing issue with one of the payers. We need to get beyond that and think about improving the future of health care in this country." ❖

Program Highlights

The ABC's of the GA: Structure, terminology and schedule of the Rhode Island General Assembly

Dr. Tsiongas drew upon his experience as a former State Representative to illuminate the General Assembly's lawmaking process and draw some stark contrasts between the House of Medicine and the State House.

Remedial Lobbying: Helping legislators help you

Kim Ross, nationally known political consultant and former Vice President for Public Policy at the Texas Medical Association, used colorful anecdotes to illustrate the good, the bad and the ugly of lobbying lawmakers on health care policy.

Politics DO Drive Policy: Why the merits of your case may not prevail

Dr. Cirillo spoke to participants about the direct relationship between the political process and lawmaking at the State House. To achieve the policy advancements we want, he said, physicians must raise their profile with lawmakers by becoming more active in campaigns and more visible at the General Assembly.

Swimming with Sharks: Negotiating the political currents of Washington, DC

Todd Askew, Director of the AMA Division of Congressional Affairs, spoke on health care advocacy at the federal level.

Know Your Toolbox: Grassroots are the building blocks of effectiveness

Dr. Migliori took participants on an interactive guided tour of the online advocacy resources available to Rhode Island physicians via the RIMS and AMA websites. He highlighted RIMS' VoterVoice grassroots system, which gives physicians direct contact with lawmakers.

Two Minute Drill: Making sure lawmakers hear your message when the clock is ticking

Former Clinton Whitehouse aide Christine Heenan offered tips on how to hone a message and make an effective case at the State House.

Keynote

U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse asked his audience to "find your voice" and advocate for the future of medicine. "I need your help," he said.