

KEY CONTACTS: MAKING OUR LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM WORK



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The role of the Key Contact Physician is the most important part of the Florida Medical Association's many-faceted legislative program. It is they who are first to approach their legislators with information about pending health care legislation and serve as expert resources throughout the process.

Without the strong, consistent presence of physicians who are informed and able to communicate positions on issues at the local level, organized medicine risks being perceived by legislators as simply another big, special-interest group. Elected officials are much more likely to respond positively to influences from their own constituents than to an ambiguous presence in Tallahassee.

Key Contacts meet personally with their legislators at least twice a year. The first meeting, in the fall, lays the groundwork for all subsequent meetings and contacts and covers all potential issues in very broad and general terms. After the new year, second meetings become more issue-specific and key contacts seek commitments on votes for the most critical issues. The results of these meetings are relayed to FMA staff so that plans can be made for handling the issues once session convenes.

While the legislature meets, Key Contacts are often called upon to contact their legislators prior to critical votes. They may also be asked to encourage their colleagues to call, write letters or send telegrams to legislators about specific issues. If an individual vote on an issue gains critical importance, the physician may travel to Tallahassee to make a request for support in person.

As this article goes to press, Key Contact Physicians are meeting with our

legislators across the state in efforts to create a favorable atmosphere for our legislative priorities. In a year that seems certain to be dominated by budgetary constraints and funding problems, their task is sure to be difficult — and more important than ever.

This year physicians representing the interests of organized medicine are working with our legislators prior to the start of the legislative session on March 5. The following is a sampling of what will probably be the most important medical issues before the 1991 Florida Legislature:

- **AIDS:** Legislation will be sought to allow physicians to test patients for AIDS when medically indicated in their professional judgement. In addition, positive HIV tests should be reported to county public health units and contact tracing should be done. Of course, confidentiality remains an important concern as it is with any other doctor-patient relationship.

- **Mandatory Medicare Assignment:** The Florida Medical Association opposes this legislation which would make it a condition of licensure that Florida physicians accept what Medicare deems to be reasonable payment as total payment for services regardless of the patient's ability to pay.

- **Access Issues:** Physicians recognize the need for increased access to medical care, particularly among the indigent. The FMA proposes that physicians who agree to treat indigents for free or under contract to government agencies should receive liability protection while providing these services. In addition, physicians who deliver babies for mothers who have had no prenatal care should receive some form of liability protection.

In certain areas, there has been a growing call for a some kind of state-run health care system. House Bill 1 would establish a "Universal Access" plan for Florida. The FMA opposes this bill and is currently working with business groups around the state to come up with rational solutions to the problems they are having in obtaining affordable health care coverage for their employees.

- **PIP Fee Schedule:** The auto insurance industry has proposed that physicians who treat auto accident victims under personal injury protection policies be governed by a workers compensation-type fee schedule. The FMA opposes any legislation that would impose such controls because they have not proved to be effective in reducing costs.

- **Boating Safety:** Florida leads the nation in boating fatalities and injury. The FMA supports legislation that would license boat operators and assure that they are educated about current boating safety skills.

In addition to the issues listed here, it is likely that over 400 pieces of legislation will be addressed by the legislature that could have an impact on the practice of medicine in Florida. Key Contact Physicians operating in the best interest of medical professionals and the public will, in many instances, be responsible for our legislators having the ability to make well-informed decisions when these bills come before them.

Without our Key Contact Physicians it is unlikely that our legislative program would continue to be credible and successful in today's complicated legislative environment.

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