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SCHOOL OF MEDICINE  
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# Wisconsin Ophthalmologists go to Washington

By Tim Daley, MD



University of Wisconsin second-year ophthalmology resident Dr. Timothy Daley was joined by UW Associate Professor of Ophthalmology Dr. Michael Ip to attend the American Academy of Ophthalmology's (AAO) annual Congressional Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. on April 22, 2010. Dr. Daley's participation was kindly sponsored by the Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology to help promote resident advocacy in national health policy.

While on Capitol Hill, Drs. Daley and Ip joined over 300 AAO ophthalmologists and residents from across the country to discuss healthcare issues with their respective U.S. Representatives, Senators, and legislative aides. Drs. Daley and Ip joined their counterparts from the Medical College of Wisconsin, Drs. Aaron Holtebeck and Gaurav Singh to meet with the offices of Representatives Tammy Baldwin, Jim Sensenbrenner, and Gwen Moore, and Senators Russ Feingold and Herb Kohl.

Among the major issues discussed was permanently fixing or repealing Medicare's Standard Growth Rate (SGR) formula, which has been a significant cause of concern for not only



ophthalmologists, but all physicians and their Medicare patients. Most physicians and lawmakers agree the formula is flawed, and the continued use of short-term fixes only delays a permanent revision and lead to an ultimately more expensive revision in the future.

Also discussed was continued federal funding for the NIH and the National Eye Institute—the major source of federal ophthalmology research dollars, and certainly contributes to the cutting edge vision research that takes place at the University of Wisconsin. A final discussion point on The Hill was raising awareness of the AAO's EyeCare America Program—a volunteer program in which ophthalmologists provide free eye exams for low-income individuals. The program has already provided over 1 million free eye exams nationwide. The ophthalmologists asked to pass a resolution to commemorate the program's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

After a busy day of meeting with lawmakers, the AAO members rejoined to discuss their experiences—what went well, what did not, whose representatives were more receptive than others, and what tips people had for each other for the future as ophthalmology advocates. The Congressional Advocacy Day also provided the residents an excellent opportunity to meet with each other and chat about life at other residency programs. Overall, the meeting was a remarkably well-organized chance for over 300 ophthalmologists from across the country to meet with their legislators about the future of ophthalmology in this country. And as one ophthalmologist put it, when it comes to making federal policy if you are not at the discussion table, you might be on the menu!