Moving the Profession of Pharmacy Forward
Carleigh Cozad
PharmD Candidate 2016
University of Kansas School of Pharmacy

Just a few short months ago, the thought of being an advocate for the profession of pharmacy seemed intimidating, terrifying and completely out of reach. However, after my recent experience with the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) RxIMPACT Day on Capitol Hill, I have realized that advocating for pharmacy is as simple as sharing your experience and explaining how we, as pharmacists and pharmacy students, can help to improve patient care.

Each spring, NACDS organizes a two-day event in Washington, DC, in which pharmacists and pharmacy students from across the country are brought together to learn about, and advocate for current pro-pharmacy legislation. I had the honor of being selected to represent the University of Kansas at this two-day event on March 16th and 17th, 2016.

Day 1: NACDS RxIMPACT “U” Academy

Forty-two pharmacy students from different schools across the United States were given a crash course on advocacy and leadership, current legislation and effective Capitol Hill meeting tactics.

The education portion of the day targeted three main issues. The first, H.R. 592/S. 314, the Pharmacy and Medically Underserved Areas Enhancement Act, the second, preserving access to community pharmacies through TRICARE and the third, H.R. 793/S.1190, the Ensuring Seniors Access to Local Pharmacies Act. Our primary focus was on H.R. 592/S. 314, obtaining provider status, which could dramatically improve pharmacists’ ability to improve patient health and quality of life.

To conclude the day, we participated in a roleplaying workshop to test out our new knowledge and communication techniques and to prepare us for the meetings we would have the next day. After this part of the event, my confidence in advocating for the profession had increased dramatically.

Day 2: NACDS RxIMPACT Day on Capitol Hill

Teams of pharmacy students, pharmacists and representatives from pharmacies strategized during an early breakfast meeting and then travelled to the Capitol to meet with legislators. I was placed on a team with two representatives from Hy-Vee and a pharmacy student from South Dakota State University. Our team was assigned to Representatives and Senators from Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota. During our busy day we met with Lynn Jenkins (R-KS), Mike Rounds (R-SD), Brad Ashford (D-NE), Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE), Kristi Noem (R-SD), John Thune (R-SD), Deb Fischer (R-NE), and Ben Sasse (R-NE). Congressmen who were unavailable provided us with a well-informed legislative assistant to meet on their behalf.

During our first meeting with Representative Lynn Jenkins, I took the lead, and explained how provider status could really help pharmacists to provide care in underserved areas of the state. I discussed my background in rural Kansas, and how the excellent care provided by the pharmacists in my hometown is what inspired me to pursue a career in pharmacy. We had a great discussion about the importance of pharmacists, and since she was already a sponsor of
H.R. 592, we thanked her for her support of our profession and offered to serve as a resource for any future pharmacy issues. Rep. Jenkins seemed so excited to meet a member of her district and I am glad that I was able to show her that her support could really help to make a difference.

The rest of our meetings were much like the first, those that we spoke to that already supported the legislation seemed happy to know that they were making a difference. Those who were currently not sponsors, seemed eager to learn, and we were happy to provide information.

At the end of the day, I couldn’t believe how great it had felt to speak about pharmacy and to talk to people who really could make a difference in our profession. I no longer felt intimidated or terrified, and I knew that advocating was definitely within my reach.

**Back in Kansas**

I am so glad that I had the opportunity to attend this wonderful event. I feel like I am now prepared to speak with members of congress, and that I can have a meaningful discussion about current pharmacy legislation. I am excited to share my experience with other students and pharmacists, and to use this experience to help inspire others to participate in pharmacy advocacy. If you are considering participating in an advocacy event, I encourage you to do it! We are the future of pharmacy, and it is our duty to ensure that our profession can continue to have a positive impact on patient care. Attending NACDS RxImpact Day on Capitol Hill has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career in pharmacy, and I cannot wait for future opportunities to participate in pharmacy advocacy.