

AARC/ASRC PACT Meeting in Washington DC, 2016

Over 182 AARC PACT members and patient representatives from 43 states came together for the annual Washington DC AARC Lobby Day on April 12, 2016. Collectively, we encourage our elected officials to support HB 2948, the Medicare Telehealth Parity Act.

Advances in technology make the interactive audio and video telecommunications system an integral part of the health care system today and may help with problems patients have regarding access to quality health care professionals. Current Medicare coverage of telehealth services is limited to rural counties and other health shortage areas, and only covers the services of a select group of health care providers (physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, Social workers, and Nutrition professionals).

The current proposed bill, HB2498, if passed, would be implemented in three phases, each two years apart and would include:

- Expanded coverage to larger areas, eventually including metropolitan counties with greater than 100,000 people
- Add new qualified health care professionals including: Respiratory Therapists, Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech pathology/Audiologists, and Certified Diabetes educators to the traditional group of professionals mentioned above
- Expanded services including respiratory therapy services, audiology services and outpatient services for PT, OT and Speech pathology
- Allow for Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) for patients with COPD and heart failure and related co-morbidities when provided under chronic care management.

There are so many positive points about this bill and we highly encourage all respiratory therapists to educate yourself about this bill by reading HR2948 The Medicare Telehealth Parity Act FAQs at <http://www.aarc.org/resources/advocacy/aarc-capitol-connection/h-r-2948-the-medicare-telehealth-parity-act-faqs/>

ASRC PACT members Art Middleton, RRT and Theresa Gramlich, RRT visited personally with Congressman Bruce Westerman, Congressman Steve Womack, and Senator John Boozman, and met with the legislative assistants for Congressman Rick Crawford, and Senator Tom Cotton to speak about the importance of this bill for Arkansas patients with pulmonary disorders. The Congressmen and Senators are well aware of the advances in technology for Telehealth. All of them see it as a potential bridge for addressing the problems of access, and believe we will see Telehealth in some form or fashion in the near future. Their primary concern, of course, is the cost of providing the expanded access, as well as reimbursement issues for services and providers. There are currently nine (9) other legislative initiatives that focus on telehealth and remote patient monitoring and there could be more in the future. But HB2498 is the ONLY bill that covers telehealth respiratory services and respiratory therapists as telehealth providers. One bill currently gaining momentum is the Clinical Opportunities for Novel and Necessary Effective Care Technologies (CONNECT) for Health Act which addresses the issues of payment and

reimbursement for physicians. The CONNECT bill has many of the same supporters as HB2948. Thus, it is possible that HB2948 could be combined with the CONNECT bill and attached to a larger bill to be passed. Currently, there is a subcommittee in the Senate known as the Senate Finance Committee Chronic Care Working Groups that may help with the movement of our bill (or key parts of it) through the senate.

Although none of the Arkansas delegation signed on in support of HB2948, they seemed somewhat encouraged and want to see if a companion bill is introduced into the Senate first. Other PACT representatives were successful in getting their Congressmen to sign on in support of HB2948. As of this writing, 41 Congressmen, both democrats and republicans have signed on in support of our bill. More are expected to sign on in the coming weeks. Thus, we remain “cautiously optimistic” in this election year that something may actually get passed.

Finally, to all of you who sent letters to your Congressmen and Senators, a heartfelt THANK YOU! Approximately 39,000 messages were sent in the 2 weeks preceding Hill Day visits and 435 of those were from Arkansas. Your support helps give credibility to our efforts. You bring value to our profession and hope to our patients with chronic lung disease.