Hello and welcome to the Rx Counter a podcast produced by student pharmacists at the University of Iowa College of Pharmacy, we provide student insight in the pharmacy profession. I'm your host, Matt Yates. And here with me today is a group of student advocates passionate about raising awareness for the profession, making change at the beginning of each year, that I will pharmacy Association holds what they call the legislative day, where they bring in a lot of students, a lot of pharmacist, to the capital of Iowa, to talk to legislators about our profession. And I think it'd be a great opportunity for us now to talk about the importance of advocacy. So my first question is, why is advocacy important?

Unknown Speaker 0:43
I think Yeah, because I think advocacy is important because it's a problem that has been addressed on the podcast before. People don't know a lot about the expertise that now nearly Farm says, hold on. But also the skills that we have to think it's important because that we have a lot to offer the world of healthcare, we have a lot to offer the world of public health specifically, if you want to look at what Farm says, hold on. But also the skills that we have to think it's important because that we have a lot to offer the world of healthcare, we have a lot to offer the world of public health specifically, if you want to look at medication therapy stuff in terms of chronic disease, state management, all of that happened, not on its own, but because we told people, hey, we have the ability to do this, and to do it. Well, that only happened because we advocated for our profession, at the legislative level, state and federal. And I think that progression of the practice of pharmacy, at least in recent years, is a testament to how well some people are advocating for the profession.

Unknown Speaker 1:58
So legislators want what is best for their constituents, as do pharmacists for their patients. And so informing them as to what we can provide, that benefits their constituents and our patients, helps them and facilitates their learning as to why this is important to us why this can be important to them and how it can benefit people. So I just think it's important to be proud, what we do on a daily basis, it's okay to, you know, hype yourself up and say, Hey, we're doing all this cool stuff. We want you to learn about it, we want you to, you know, help us do it even better and do even more scope of practice so we can benefit patients more. So, you know, they don't get to experience what we do on a daily basis. So it's our job to explain to them what we do. And, you know, tell them, this is what we can do as well. That way they can, you know, on behalf of us move some legislation forward.

Unknown Speaker 3:18
And what's also nice is a lot of the pharmacy organizations also have a lot of talking points that they already have written out. So you kind of just have to go look for him. And then you can just say, I'm with this organization, or here's the stance that will be generally hold.

Unknown Speaker 3:32
As a student coming in, I'd had maybe a couple years of experience as a technician prior to entering pharmacy school. But then after becoming a student intern, I was just in the thick of it like, I always know pharmacy, gave out vaccinations, coming to realize that that wasn't a thing. You know, within my lifetime. I didn't realize so soon The importance of that and the advocacy that happened behind getting pharmacists to provide the community with vaccinations was really cool. I know in 2018 in Iowa, we just got statewide protocols for vaccinations where we don't have to have a physician sign off on all of our vaccine giving. So there's a lot to change there. But we've come so far within such a small amount of time. I think that's why advocacy is important, but on do legislative day, talking to legislators is not something we're taught in school. And as Meredith mentioned before, educating yourself is important. And staying up to date on your topics, as a profession is a great place to start. But coming to realize that legislators aren't really associated with the final profession, most of the pharmacists, but those are few and far between. So how best to talk to legislators and something I think we should all know.

Unknown Speaker 5:11
Yeah. And I feel like one of the better ways to do that is to get an elevator speech prepared for each thing you want to
do, and maybe try and figure out what they want specifically, or what they're looking for what their views are. As Aaron said, at one point, before the pod started,

Unknown Speaker 5:31
what is it? Yeah, you have to meet them where they're at is what you said,

Unknown Speaker 5:34
right? Yeah. Yeah. They don't know. You know, as much as we do. So they just want to hear about the information that we're educated on. And so if you have the elevator speech prepared and ready to touch base on that will just, you know, prompt the conversation wants the conversation it started, it can go into whatever direction you lead it into. And so facilitating the conversation was stories about why this will benefit them. Why Previous legislation and pharmacy has benefited them and their constituents. It's just making it relatable to them.

Unknown Speaker 6:07
And I think making it relatable is important because I remember I was talking to this one random legislator and one of the IPA days. And he asked what was important and I was telling him what was important, but he just didn't seem interested in and I think it's because I wasn't really in it to him specifically, I was just stating our main facts and he just kind of like accepted and walked away, but I didn't feel like I made a difference there.

Unknown Speaker 6:29
Alright, so something to do before legislator day Logan brought it up is look at those resources online as to what the points are that, you know, maybe I will pharmacy Association wants us to touch on with legislators, but then really, you know, reflecting on it and thinking what those points mean to you. And then how can this How can those points, you know, benefit them and patients and patient lives, and then be able to create a story from that, as opposed to just start listing the points because I'm sure they had heard of before and they really wanted to hear what the these points mean, how can you explain these points to us on a real life scenario that really would put everything into perspective for us? You know,

Unknown Speaker 7:11
last year, I had an opportunity to talk to a freshman legislator. So it was his. It's his first time in his in his first term, and he'd never had the Iowa pharmacist legislative day experience, which I know a lot of groups go to the Capitol to talk to legislators, but this is the first time he's hearing from all these pharmacists, pharmacy interns, pharmacy students, and technicians. So that's a lot of times where you can make the greatest impact. So if you do have a freshman legislator in your area, that's a key person you can talk to because a lot of times you're the first person they might be getting any of this information from. And so that's another time where it's important to ask like, Well, what do you know so far? So we can make sure that we're not going above or below what they already know.

Unknown Speaker 8:05
Right? And offering yourself as a resource to especially if they're of freshman legislator, they might just be naive, they just don't know. So offering yourself as that resource, I think is an important thing to another balance to have is between facts and stories. Because facts you can say that 17% of people get benefit from medication. x, which is kind of what we're taught. That's how we learned as pharmacists, but it's the stories that will probably have the most impact the most resonance with a lot of legislators so having that balance where we live in our world of facts, and we have to be able to convey those facts in a meaningful way and the stories are a good way to do that.

Unknown Speaker 8:55
Here's a fact for you. Facts impact 2% of people will stories impact 98% of people, which one would you rather use?

Unknown Speaker 9:04
Is that a factor?

Unknown Speaker 9:09
In an example of that, we were taught this when we were p ones, when we were really pushing for expanded immunizations. You know, we were thinking, how do we bring this up to legislators and they said, you know, what
happens when you go to the pharmacy with your child to get your vaccine and you are able to get it, but your child is not? Well, that's great that you got it. However, now you have to take a day off of work, schedule an appointment with the physician, go to the physician's office, and have to take the kid out of school in order for them to get a vaccine. When, with the legislation that we were promoting, they could have had it done at the pharmacy. So that kind of store was like wow, that would have really benefited me at that time that I went to go get my vaccine if I could have given my child one there as well. And just putting into that kind of perspective into for them, they just realized, you know, this does make sense if if I getting get why can't they get it? And so just putting into perspective for them and resonating it with them?

Unknown Speaker 10:06
Yeah, I feel like a lot of times were intimidated. I know as a p one or even a p two last year, I was intimidated from talking to legislators, but like you said, Aaron, they are just regular people, they have families, they have kids. And so if you can put know a little bit of their background and try to put it into a perspective that is meaningful for them and their life, you can make a pretty good impact.

Unknown Speaker 10:31
It's also interesting because when we go to legislative day, we all wear our white coats, for all we know, they may be more intimidated, then we are speaking to them. And for the example you gave about the freshman legislator, his first time experiencing this, I mean, I'm sure there's some nerves with him as well. So you know, just calm down and then go to talk to this person. And just like Paul said, bring up some stories. Let's have a conversation with them. It doesn't need to be going down a laundry list of things you want them to do. Just started out to the conversation. And if it starts going, you know, off topic, just reel it back in, but that's okay.

Unknown Speaker 11:07
And you can go with a friend, you don't have to do this all alone. Sometimes there's even other like pharmacies who've been practicing for like 510 years that are willing to go with you that are at these events. I saw someone that I did a rotation with that was there and I went and talked with them. And then we went and talked to legislators together like, this is people you've met along the way, and you can get a lot of help from them when you're there.

Unknown Speaker 11:31
It just goes to show the importance of making connections is pharmacies is was the number one. But let's go back to legislators, kind of derailing your train of conversation that happened to me last year. And I think it's just easier for a legislator to talk about the things that he or she does on a daily basis. So instead of talking about pharmacy, we started talking about the water and I was like, well, waters important, but

Unknown Speaker 12:03
why know what else is important? Lucia? Obviously not that direct but

Unknown Speaker 12:08
right. But it is important to actually take control of your conversation. And that's hard for students who are younger, especially with a little more seasoned legislators. You don't really want to step on their toes and take too much control. But how do you still control your conversation?

Unknown Speaker 12:32
There's, in my experience, I'm kind of anticipating where they could be railed towards. So looking up to say, all right, what subcommittees what committees are they on in their legislature, so if you know that they're going to be on appropriations, which has to do a lot with finance, be ready and prepared for them to say, well spending is up 15% this that or the other or If they're on something to do with the environment, being able to anticipate those and having some way to tie it back. specific examples are hard to bring up. Because there's a lot of committees, a lot of subcommittees and a lot of topics that are important to the world of pharmacy. But just thinking through how to get back on topic, just having some sort of a rough outline of a plan, I think is really helpful. That might be something to do on your third or fourth time talking to a legislator, not necessarily having that your back pocket, like ready to go on first time. But still knowing and having that backup plan, I guess that contingency to bring it back to topic. I think it's important,
and it doesn't have to be the exact topics that you know IPA is telling us to talk to them about. Because if it starts going concerns D railing and you just bring it back to pharmacy as a profession, just any topic and pharmacy and just start telling stores. That means, you know, maybe you were able to get the points across, but down the line, they're like oddish. Remember, I really resonated with that one pharmacy student and then they're more likely to, you know, side with the pharmacy side as opposed to maybe their opposition. So I mean, it doesn't need to be talking about that list of items. It just needs to be promoting pharmacy and putting it in a good light. So then down the line, they're like, I really liked that pharmacy student I I really, I really believe in what pharmacists are doing.

Unknown Speaker 14:40
What types of things do you recommend that students do to prepare to talk to a legislator? I know we talked about working up subcommittees and seeing where they might want to talk about what's easier for them to talk about. And what else do we do it we can look up the legislator online just to figure out who's representing your district, your hometown. Or if you're at a university that's out of state for you just look up where you universities from. What else do we do?

Unknown Speaker 15:15
Well, to get the talking confidence, I think it would be important to maybe give a friend a relative that you don't see on a daily basis, but someone that you can talk to give them a call and then practice your elevator speech to them. And then see where that conversation goes and practice with them. Because I mean, they're not going to judge you by any means and they understand that you're just trying to learn and practice. So you know, find someone you feel comfortable with. And then just practice what you would say that way you can at least get those words out of your mouth, figure out how you're going to formulate your sentences and figure out the topics that you want to talk about. And then if it gets you know off topic, find a way that you will reel them back in and then just practicing beforehand so when it comes comes to the game time with the legislators, you're prepared.

Unknown Speaker 16:01
I really like that suggestion. And I think going on top of that, like that experience would give you a good platform for showing what non pharmacists know about pharmacy, because we're always in the our own little bubble over here. So if you're talking to a relative that is not in healthcare, not pharmacy related that can help predict what legislators might have as well, as a background.

Unknown Speaker 16:29
I think it could also be helpful prior to going into it. If there are topics that you know, are very pertinent, if you like, most of the people on the planet don't know everything going on with drug pricing, because it's incredibly complicated in its own right, having a resource because that's something that's also probably going to be brought up. So if they say so what do you know about PBM reform? What do you know about drug importation? Is You have a resource for them saying, I that's something I'm not an expert in. But here's somebody that is is an incredible opportunity to because that means that they're interested in it, if they're interested in it. I think it's worth capitalizing and making sure that we can fix it in the right way if it's become an issue.

Unknown Speaker 17:22
Yeah, and to help prepare as well, I know at least in Iowa here we have a really great pharmacy association that helps to prepare the our priorities within pharmacy in a way that's going to help get it out there for legislators to understand as well as for students to understand. So encouraging people in other states to do the same seek out the your local, either county level or state level pharmacy association to see if they have priorities already lined up, which most of them probably do. And then if not, then you can also go ahead and go to any national organization. You're in like ASAP a PHA or ncpa. They all have their own individual priorities. So you can, even if you're not in those, you can go ahead and go to their website and pick and choose and find what's important to you and what you're passionate about. So when you are speaking to a legislator, you know what's going on.

Unknown Speaker 18:21
I know in our college, we put together a great event to help us prepare. So like Aaron was talking about talking to your relatives, talking to friends, even outside the healthcare system to practice. We did that with students and matched some
experience students up with some newer students to actually talk about the priorities and actually give the elevator pitch. This was great just because of that communication practice, but also to come together as a college to see Who all is ready to advocate who wants to, and then grouping up and saying, Hey, we are all going to go on legislative day or even outside of legislative day, you can talk to a legislator, and just be at the capital all together. So if you're a p one, you maybe start the conversation say, Hey, what do you know about this topic? And then if you get a question that you don't know, you're with backup with students that may know the answer, and so on and so forth down the pharmacists expert or specialist that can actually speak on it if no one else can.

Unknown Speaker  19:45
And what we found out on legislative prep day is, you know, the P ones and maybe some of the PTS who didn't think that they would know what to talk about, actually were a lot more informative of the topics than they thought. And so I mean, just think about why you Joe's pharmacy school what I mean, you have a passion here, what is it about? And then put that into words that you can bring that to the legislator? And, obviously, I mean, you probably know a lot more than you think that you know, and being able to bring that to light to the legislators will help you I mean, this year, following years and as you advocate as a pharmacist as well,

Unknown Speaker  20:23
I think it's important to just having that follow up to, when talking to somebody say, I don't know about it, let me get back to you. Or if I don't know about it, here's a person. If you follow up or if you go to consecutive legislative days, they'll see you there. they'll recognize you because you're you're likely you didn't move all that much. So your legislators going to remain the same. And having that repeated exposure. There's a rapport that's built, there's trust that's to be had. And if you are for yourself as a resource, maybe there's contact outside of the most like slative days, but showing how much we care about certain topics tells its own story. Especially if we come back, we continue to hammer on the same topics again and again and again. That'll that'll land might not be the first time and not be the fourth time, but it will land.

Unknown Speaker  21:22
And we've proved year after year. I mean, we bring hundreds of students to the Capitol for legislative day. And you know, some other organizations don't bring even 50 or 20. So I mean, we make an impact just with that presence, and then realizing, they're like, wow, there's a lot of people here, they must really care about what they're about their profession. And so I think, year after year after year, it's important that we continue to come and can continue to advocate because, you know, some other groups are and if nobody is, nobody will and so we have to do it, in order for us to, you know, grow our profession.

Unknown Speaker  22:00
I make the analogy of advocacy and fighting for a test question back. When you have your hospital exam question that was clearly wrong. The whole class says this was a wrong question. But there's only a couple of students that actually email the professor, course coordinator and say, Hey, this was actually wrong. Can we look into it? And then if they argue, well, you all get the point back and the whole class is happy, based on the couple people that stood up to advocate and profession advocacy. Ice is the same thing where there's a few of us that are actually going to go to the Capitol to yell at the legislators and say, Hey, we we can do all these better things, please give us the ability to do it. And then we get it and then all the pharmacists are happy about it.

Unknown Speaker  22:58
And on the flip side, sometimes numbers do matter. So sometimes on those examples, when you go to the professor say, hey, this question is we all think it was wrong. Who's we all four of us? Well, there's 100 people in your class where they sorry, we're not giving you the point, point back. Now that could happen with legislators to at the Capitol. why there's so few of you here. Well, we don't have a reason for that. But if we all come together, and we all advocate for our passion and our profession, we all are saying the same things would probably have a better chance of getting the point across and having legislators side with us.

Unknown Speaker  23:35
And the last thing I'd like to touch on his continued talking with a legislator, because we've been talking about legislative day, and that's one day out of the entire year that we all dress up and go to the Capitol. But that's not the only
time you can talk to a legislator, especially as a student, if you say, Hey, can we talk about this sometime I've heard That legislators love to talk to students because we're not politicians or the like banging on their door to talk about mundane facts and everything, we just want to have a real conversation. So what are ways that we can do that?

Unknown Speaker 24:21
Some ways that an organization here has done that is bringing in a legislator, we FaceTime them as a group, to talk about an issue we were really passionate about. And we got that information from the legislator who wrote the bill. But then he gave us advice about who are the opposing parties and how we can reach out to them specifically about how to maybe change their minds or just reasons why it didn't pass in the past and how we could get it to pass in the future. So getting information directly from the source. And I mean, that was just from getting some students to send us You emails and it worked. So it's very pleased with the outcome. And then also we did a letter writing campaign. So this one was about another bill that was pretty specific. And this was at a national level. And so we emailed our Iowa senators and representatives to make sure that we from Iowa, we let them know that we do think this is important. And we do want this to pass and we want you to vote for it. So that's a couple ways you could do it on a state level or a national level. I think some people did get letters back from the letter writing campaign. Not everybody. I did not

Unknown Speaker 25:40
but

Unknown Speaker 25:42
but some of us did. And so that's an emails back and providing a follow up and contact information so you can get that response and maybe build a relationship, starting with one bill and then maybe you can become a resource for other topics within pharmacy as well.

Unknown Speaker 25:56
And don't quote me on it, but I think in the house, it did pass. So that was Need to see it actually happened.

Unknown Speaker 26:01
That was pretty cool. I think

Unknown Speaker 26:04
other ways that

Unknown Speaker 26:07
I've used to at least be up to date, certain things being introduced, is every state should have a website dedicated to any bills that are proposed any rules that are proposed. And every few weeks I'll go on there and there's usually a keyword search and I'll throw in pharmacy, I'll throw in health care and just see if anything pops up.

Unknown Speaker 26:30
health care and just see if anything pops up.

Unknown Speaker 26:33
Or there's another one I think through.

Unknown Speaker 26:38
I don't remember who it's hosted through, but it's a website called Bula LA, bu la long.com. And you can have it where your legislature you'll automatically get an email once a week to say these bills were introduced. So it kind of take some of the legwork out of it and being up to date on those. He's a Hey, this is going to be, you can contact your legislator and say, Hey, this is going to be coming to your subcommittee. I know that we talked on this in the past kind of recalling back, and then going forward. If you have any questions about it, I offer, offer yourself as a resource, which is just kind of reiterating the same point we've had a few times

Unknown Speaker 27:20
starting a conversation with the legislators.
Right. And it was, Meredith said, It is about building those relationships. You know, you can be utilized as a resource time after time after time again, but you need to have that first interaction to build that relationship. So mean, some people might think this is going to be a one time thing, but this legislator might actually reach out to you for a lot of pharmacy or any health care related legislation that's being passed through in the future. So I mean, building that relationship is very important.

I agree. But that's all the time we have. Thank you for listening. We hope you learned if you did, pass the lessons along to friends and family. Thanks for listening and we'll catch you next time with Rx Counter.