

Those of us in the ostomate community have found that once we adjust to our intestinal or urinary diversions, we often resume our lives with little thought to the political architecture around us. Yet we do belong to a larger community that has unique issues and needs.

An ostomate would no more leave the house for work or school without their pouching system than an amputee would leave without their artificial leg. Most permanent ostomates are amputees having had their internal organs removed or reconstructed to such a point that reversal is not an option.

Medical terms define a **prosthesis, prosthetic, or prosthetic limb** as an artificial device extension that replaces a missing body part. Our pouching systems replace the functionality of our amputated organs. Awareness of this basic fact and its broader implications is the first step in addressing ignorance and bureaucracy.

The 112th Congressional Session received House Resolution 152 introduced by Representative Leonard Lance of New Jersey's 7th District and a similar Senate Resolution 95 by Senator Richard Burr of North Carolina on March 8th of this year. Both resolutions, although differently worded, request similar attention.

HR 152 text highlights (complete resolution text can be viewed via the Google search engine)

Identifying the key issues:

- Whereas following ostomy surgery, patients need specially selected medical prosthetics to manage, temporarily or permanently restore intestinal or urinary system function, re-establish activities of daily living, improve quality of life; and require access to uniquely skilled ostomy specialty nurses who recommend and customize ostomy products for patients;...
- Whereas, however, ostomy products are reimbursed under the Medicare program as medical supplies and not as prosthetics;...
- Whereas there is a significant inconsistency under the Medicare program between the coverage category of, and reimbursement policy for, ostomy products;...
- Whereas ostomy products are prosthetic devices prescribed by health care providers and meet the definition of prosthetics under the Medicare program;...
- Whereas the Federal law does not require coverage of prosthetics, including ostomy products, under the Medicaid program;...
- Whereas ostomy products are customized to the clinical needs of individual patients and are not the same as other easily interchangeable medical supplies such as gauze and bandages;...

Identifying the key recognitions:

- (1) Recognizes the life-saving role of ostomy care and prosthetics in the daily lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the United States and the necessity of a specialized ostomy nurse to recommend and customize ostomy prosthesis for the individual;
- (2) recognizes if a surgical procedure results in a patient needing a prosthetic that manages or restores intestinal or urinary system function--specifically the control of the elimination of the body's waste products, then such a patient should have access to individually prescribed, customized prosthetics that the health care provider believes will best meet the patient's needs;
- 3) urges that ostomy products be recognized, categorized, covered, and adequately reimbursed by Medicare in a new payment category of "prosthetic supplies" consistent with Medicare's current recognition of ostomy products as prosthetics in order to allow appropriate patient access; and
- (4) Urges the Secretary of Health and Human Services to ensure that programs, policies, and payment practices of the Department of Health and Human Services facilitate, and do not discourage, innovation of and access to medical devices that restore or improve intestinal or

Linda Aukett, the UOAA's Advocacy Chair, was contacted regarding the significance of these resolutions and how they relate to our community. She advised that "It is very important our public policy makers understand that ostomy pouches and wafers are very different in function than single-use medical supplies such as bandages."

Ms. Aukett went on to state that these key issues have needed attention for a long time. She shared that this particular set of resolutions had a strong beginning as they were introduced at the same the Great Comebacks awards were made. Each of the award recipients had the opportunity to meet with their representatives in person while in Washington DC.

Gaining momentum, grass roots support for these items was cultivated at the annual WOCN conference in June. UOAA and Convatec presented information on the resolutions at their booths. The Convatec booth also provided computers and direct links to the Capwiz site so visitors could instantly show their support.

Additionally a 'Capwiz' easy button or widget has been added to the www.UOAA.org site under their advocacy tab. A similar widget has been placed on our www.OstomyHouston.org web site under Useful Links. This click-once button allows a person to send messages to both their Senate and House representatives. Each person will be prompted for their name, address and email information to ensure the request is routed to the proper office.

Ms. Aukett shared that every email or letter sent was important, however, in today's high tech arena, a simple sincere phone call was even more powerful as a follow-up or substitution to the email. If you don't have the resources to contact your representatives electronically, consider working with a family member who does or possibly using free computer access at the local library.

Calling Your Congressional Representatives

If you are going to call, be prepared to provide your name, address, and ZIP code so the staff can verify you are a constituent of the Member of Congress. Reference the resolutions specifically by bill number and session number. Talk about the impact of the resolution on you and your own reason for supporting it. Recommendations are that you personalize, stay short and on target with your issue.

Our representatives are only able to respond to their constituents, people who live in their service area. To save time, please verify you are contacting the correct representative either by checking on your voter registration card (Us Rep or State Senator boxes). If you do not have your voter registration card handy, you can contact your local Tax Office for the same information.

Position	Title	Name	Coverage Area	Phone
Senate	Senator	xxxx	State	xxx-xxx-xxxx
Senate	Senator	xxxx	State	xxx-xxx-xxxx
Representative	Congressman	Xxxxxxx	District xx	xxx-xxx-xxxx
Representative	Congressman	xxxxxxx	District xx	xxx-xxx-xxxx

Contact information obtained from representatives' web sites.

Most resolutions are routed through various committees to allow for closer inspection by key members before the resolution is forwarded on or not. Critical Committee members that will be looking at our resolutions are **bolded** and starred above.

We have spent much of the last year talking about volunteer opportunities and ways to make a lasting difference. Let's join together and make a big difference now.