

CONGRESSIONAL FACILITY TOUR GUIDANCE

Purpose: To help AOPA members arrange and conduct a facility tour for members of Congress.

Goal: To improve lawmakers' knowledge of the O&P profession, show the custom nature of O&P services, and illustrate how dramatically O&P services improve the lives of patients in need of these services.

Additional Help: Contact AOPA's director of regulatory affairs, Catherine Graf, at (571) 431-0807.

How to Request a Visit

1. To obtain the names of your elected representatives and their phone and fax numbers, visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.
2. Call the district office of your member of the House of Representatives and ask for the Congressperson's scheduler. The same is true for Senate lawmakers. You will need to contact the nearest senate office in your state and ask to speak with the Senator's scheduler.
3. Most lawmakers want you to make your request in writing and ask that you fax your request to their offices. Your letter can be very simple; list who you are, what you are requesting, why you are requesting the visit and when you would like the lawmaker to visit your facility.

What You Need to Know Once Your Lawmaker Accepts Your Invitation

1. Consider contacting local media outlets such as newspapers or local television stations, and inform your lawmaker of your plans. Use the facility visit to raise awareness of not only your practice or business, but also of the valuable time your lawmaker is affording you through a visit. Such a visit can be a win-win situation for both you and your lawmaker.
2. Have you treated any unique patients? You could use the visit as a time to show your work to the media as well as get your lawmaker additional publicity.
3. Assume that your member of Congress has very little understanding of orthotics and prosthetics. While it is very likely that your legislator is familiar with the Medicare program, it is unlikely that he/she understands the details of O&P and how the industry fits into the Medicare program. The issues that you may want to discuss with your lawmaker include:
 - *How and why you entered the O&P profession as well as the training that was needed.* Many lawmakers may assume that you are a medical doctor. You will need to differentiate yourself from MDs. But you may want to tell him/her how

you work closely with physicians to treat the medical condition of each of your patients.

- *The process of providing an orthotic device to a patient.* Conduct a “show and tell” exhibit of various types of orthotic devices. Describe what they are, why they are needed and what they do. If patients aren’t available, fit an orthotic device to the lawmaker, such as an AFO. Your goal here is to illustrate the steps you take to provide an orthotic device to a patient.
- *The process of providing a prosthetic device to a patient.* Conduct a “show and tell” exhibit of various types of prosthetic devices. Discuss the underlying conditions that lead to amputations as well as all the steps that are necessary to fit a device to the patient. It is also useful to give some idea of the cost of devices. You can also discuss the recent advances in prosthetic technology and what that means to patients.
- *The set-up of an O&P facility.* Show the lawmaker around your facility. Raise distinctions between DME stores and your practice. Show how your office is arranged—that you have a patient care facility to evaluate and treat your patients as well as an area with equipment necessary to fabricate and customize devices to patients. Lawmakers generally have no idea of the added overhead that is required to provide orthotic and prosthetic services to patients.

4. Tell how O&P fits into the Medicare program. It is very important for them to know that you receive one payment from Medicare for all of the following:

- Evaluation of the patient
- Fabricating/fitting the device to the patient
- Device payment itself
- 90 days of follow up care

The reason you must explain the Medicare O&P payment structure is because most lawmakers are unaware that O&P professionals receive one payment for the work described in the previous bullet points. They may unwittingly assume that you receive a payment for office visits, a payment for the device itself, as well as any follow-up care that is required to ensure that a device is meeting the medical needs of the patient.

You should tell them that your work requires a prescription and that you work closely with physicians to treat the patient’s medical condition. This is important to note because it reduces or eliminates the potential for fraud and abuse within the Medicare program.

5. At some point, you will want to discuss your concerns with legislative issues. AOPA is available to provide issue papers on key O&P matters that provide you with information to discuss the merits of those issues. Additionally, you may give these issue papers directly to the lawmakers. Also available are talking points on key O&P issues to help guide your discussion. It will be helpful to familiarize yourself with key points on O&P issues.

Do not feel limited in what you discuss with your member of Congress. This is your time to discuss your issues of concern. If you have a problem that you believe outweighs the issues AOPA is working on by all means raise that issue and see if your lawmaker is willing to help.

Keep in mind that all the information you provide is second-nature to you, but it is probably very new to your lawmaker. Try not to overwhelm your lawmaker with a list of issues and lots of detail. Avoid using jargon and keep it as simple and straightforward as possible.

AOPA would suggest that you try to limit your discussion to one or two key legislative issues (once you establish a relationship, you will have time to raise additional issues in the future). For example, you may choose to focus on pending O&P legislation that your lawmaker may be able to support as a co-sponsor.

And finally, remember always try to frame your issues from the standpoint of access to care and quality of care. Unless it is absolutely necessary, do not say that you are not being paid enough for your services. This may certainly be the case, but it appears to the outside observer that you are greedy and more concerned with your bottom line than patient care.

Final Thoughts:

Enjoy yourself. This is your time to meet your elected House or Senate representatives. Be respectful and polite, but don't be afraid to ask your lawmaker for help.