

On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, ASN Science Policy Fellows Allison Dostal, PhD, RD, and Lynn Ulatowski, PhD, participated in the Rally for Medical Research Capitol Hill Day in Washington, DC. The event, which was organized by members of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), brought together a record-breaking group of nearly 400 individuals, each eager to share their stories about the importance of medical research funding. At the forefront of this assembly were patients and patient advocates, who praised the treatment advances that have stemmed from medical research, while also calling attention to the fact that there is still so much work to do. Their pleas focused on the need to continue – and increase – research funding, a sentiment that was echoed by the many scientists and physicians that attended the Rally. Together the group brought a cohesive and simple message to the Hill: support robust, sustained and predictable funding for medical research. Participants acknowledged and thanked members of Congress for approving the \$2 billion increase in research funding for Fiscal Year 2016, but encouraged them not to stop there. Additionally, the group conveyed the support of the House 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act (H.R. 6) and urged the Senate to pass the Innovation for Healthy Americans initiative in order to secure 5 years of mandatory NIH funding for medical research.

Events began on the afternoon before the Rally, when attendees were trained on how to effectively deliver the group's message and heard inspirational personal stories of success. The evening culminated with a reception at Cannon House Office Building in the Capitol Hill complex. Distinguished speakers at the reception included NIH Director Francis Collins, MD, PhD, as well as Representatives Kevin Yoder (R-KS), Kathy Castor (D-FL), Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Leonard Lance (R-NJ).

On the day of the Rally for Medical Research, Allison and Lynn each had the opportunity to meet with Senate staff members from their home states of Minnesota and Ohio, respectively, and representatives from their home districts. In all, the Science Policy Fellows met with 10 political offices, while the entire advocate rally group was able to spread their message in about 500 meetings.

In addition to participating in the Rally for Medical Research Hill Day, the Science Policy Fellows also had the opportunity to meet with individuals at the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN), and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), as well as with one of their Science Policy mentors, Van Hubbard, MD, PhD. Allison and Lynn were introduced to the goals of each office and the impact the office has on research endeavors that impact individuals across the country. While meeting with Jodi Williams, PhD, Melvin Carter, PhD, and Jane Clary, PhD, RN, at NIFA, the discussion focused on the interplay between nutrition and food safety as it applies to research funding, policy and the relationship between various programs in the agency. During the meetings at the CFSAN in College Park, MD, the fellows met with Claudine Kavanaugh, PhD, MPH, RD, Chris Waldrop, MPH, and Jordan Lin, PhD, and had the opportunity to learn first-hand the timeline, information, analysis and logistics required to adopt the new nutrition facts panel. This meeting was particularly timely, considering that the new

panel design was just revealed in May of this year. The final meeting with Melissa Goldstein, JD, and Rich Pouyat, PhD, took place at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington, DC. This meeting focused on how President Obama chooses priorities for the OSTP, how individuals are chosen for the one year appointments and the role of the committee member to provide detailed yet concise information in his or her expertise to the President.

Allison summed up her experience as follows: “As a young researcher with a growing interest in the interface between nutrition science, communication, and legislative decisions, each component of our experience – from agency visits to meeting patient advocates to sitting down with our state’s legislators - was extremely valuable. It is so important that individuals learn the skills to effectively advocate for their passion and mission, and to understand that everyone can make their voice heard.”

“Participating in the Rally for Medical Research Hill Day was humbling and empowering at the same time. I am passionate about the critical need for and advantages of medical research. I loved being a part of this monumental event. I want to stress to people everywhere to appreciate that they have the power to speak to your political leaders, and their voice can make a difference. The meetings with the federal agencies were a bit like icing on the cake” stated Lynn.

Overall, the Washington, DC, experience was extremely positive and educational for the fellows. In a span of two days, they were introduced to a variety of federal agencies, politicians, and advocates that immeasurably enhanced their overall practical knowledge of science policy. Moreover, the meetings were fittingly instructive for Allison and Lynn as they continue through their ASN Science Policy Fellowship tenure.