

# The AASLD and Public Policy: Coming in Out of the Cold

This issue of HEPATOLOGY contains the first of a new form of communication about public policy—an article on public policy of interest to the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and its members, written by an expert in the field. This is the first in a series of articles on topics identified by the AASLD Public Policy Committee (PPC), and is the result of the leadership of AASLD and the PPC recognizing the need to keep members of the association aware of public policy issues and actions taken by AASLD.

Over the last few years, the AASLD has become increasingly involved in public policy in the United States. In large part, this recent emphasis has come as a result of the most recent version of the AASLD strategic plan (found under the “Member Center” at [www.aasld.org](http://www.aasld.org)) which recognized the need for the association to become more active in public policy and advocacy. The Public Policy Committee of AASLD has recently taken a more proactive position with regard to public policy, at the direction of the governing board of AASLD. Each year, the PPC develops a written public policy agenda (found under “Press & Policy” at [www.aasld.org](http://www.aasld.org)) for the coming year. This agenda then frames the activities of the PPC for the coming year, with the approval of the governing board. The development of and the actions taken to achieve this agenda are done in collaboration with AASLD’s Washington representatives, Mr. Lyle Dennis and Ms. Jennifer Shevchek, of the firm Cavarucchio, Dennis and Associates. Their role is to acquire information of importance to the association and communicate that with the association’s leadership. They also provide invaluable advice on how the association should try to affect public policy.

For most of the first 50 years of its existence, the AASLD has focused its activities on its annual meeting and postgraduate course. The main emphasis at our annual meeting and in the AASLD’s main publication,

HEPATOLOGY, has always been on dissemination of new research findings. Education has also played a prominent role in the association’s activities, particularly with the recent introduction of a certificate of added qualification in transplant hepatology.

However, the field of hepatology has changed with the introduction of liver transplantation and availability of greater numbers of treatments for patients with acute and chronic liver diseases. This has led to the growth of our discipline and of our association. Liver diseases are the tenth largest cause of death in the United States, accounting for nearly 50,000 deaths each year.<sup>1</sup> Contributing to this is an epidemic of chronic hepatitis C viral (HCV) infection which has emerged in this country over the last 2 to 3 decades and, although the number of new cases of HCV infection has declined, the number of deaths due to chronic HCV infection is likely to rise for some time to come. HCV infection is the leading indication for liver transplantation, and the overall number of liver transplants among both adults and children has increased progressively over the last 2 decades, to nearly 7,000 each year now ([www.optn.org](http://www.optn.org)). Thus, hepatologists find themselves in the thick of public policy issues related to liver disease and organ transplantation, involved in a tussle for resources to provide care for this large number of patients.

Our increasing involvement in public policy issues has resulted in a variety of methods to communicate our activities to AASLD members, including by e-mail, faxes, articles in the AASLD newsletter, and sometimes even by announcements at our annual meeting. Readers may review some of these archived documents on the association’s web site (found under “Press & Policy” at [www.aasld.org](http://www.aasld.org)). The Governing Board and the PPC hope that by publishing regular public policy columns in our flagship publication, we can help frame issues that will affect our specialty. This first article was written by Dr. Norman Grace, the first chair of AASLD’s Public Policy Committee, and Mr. Lyle Dennis and deals with AASLD’s efforts to involve its membership in public policy issues, and the importance of all members becoming involved in the issues facing our specialty. Hopefully, this article will serve as a primer on advocacy and will take away some of the mystery of what happens in our nation’s capital. It also introduces a new system employed by AASLD that will solicit your direct communication with

---

Abbreviations: AASLD, American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases; HCV, hepatitis C virus; PPC, public policy committee.

Address reprint requests to: Adrian M. Di Bisceglie M.D., FACP, Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Department of Internal Medicine, Saint Louis University School of Medicine, 3635 Vista Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63110. E-mail: [dibiscam@slu.edu](mailto:dibiscam@slu.edu); fax: 314-268-5108.

Copyright © 2007 by the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases.

Published online in Wiley InterScience ([www.interscience.wiley.com](http://www.interscience.wiley.com)).

DOI 10.1002/hep.21772

Potential conflict of interest: Nothing to report.

your national elected officials on important issues facing AASLD and hepatology

Readers will see other similar articles that have been commissioned for publication in HEPATOLOGY over the next year on public policy issues. Wherever possible, these articles will be inspired by the public policy agenda of AASLD and will attempt to inform members of importance to them and help the association come in from the public policy cold.

ADRIAN M. DI BISCEGLIE, M.D.  
*Division of Gastroenterology and Hepatology  
Saint Louis University Liver Center  
Saint Louis University School of Medicine  
St. Louis, MO*

## Reference

1. Kim WR, Brown RS Jr, Terrault NA, El-Serag H. Burden of liver disease in the United States: summary of a workshop. HEPATOLOGY 2002;36:227-242.