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As with any rapid response initiative, the ARRT will need to act both quickly and thoughtfully when issues arise. The following pages contain an overview of some of the new programs that have been developed by the ASMBS leadership, such as the Access to Care Committee's STAR Program and President Scott Shikora's signature project—the Regional Private Payor Liaison Program. These volunteer advocates will help us gather intelligence and form alliances at the local level.

You will also learn about new advocacy tools that ASMBS is supporting, such as the Surgery State Legislative Action Center and regional advocacy forums. Check out the new ASMBS Threat Monitor that we will be using to categorize challenges to bariatric surgery coverage. Modeled after the Department of Homeland Security's color-coded system, we have established four different threat levels: RED for those threats that could affect national coverage; ORANGE for threats at the regional level; YELLOW for threats at the state level; and BLUE for threats to coverage at the county or city level.

Finally, we have included information about our advocacy partners as well as additional resources that ASMBS members can utilize at the state, regional and local levels. Working together, we will promote and protect patient access to the broad scope of treatment options for the obese patient.



ASMBS POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Patient Advocacy

The STOP Obesity Alliance
 Campaign to End Obesity
 The Obesity Society
 American Heart Association
 American Diabetes Association
 The Endocrine Society

Industry

Surgical Review Corporation
 Ethicon Endo-Surgery
 a Johnson & Johnson Company
 Covidien
 Allergan
 Synovis

Medicine & Surgery

American Medical Association & State Medical Societies
 American College of Surgeons & ACS State Chapters
 American College of Physicians
 American Osteopathic Association
 American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
 American Academy of Family Physicians
 American College of Cardiology
 American Academy of Otolaryngology-
 Head and Neck Surgery
 American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons
 American Society of Plastic Surgeons
 The Society of American Gastrointestinal
 and Endoscopic Surgeons

STATE & LOCAL RESOURCES

National Conference of
 State Legislatures
 National Association of
 Insurance Commissioners
 National Governors Association
 Council of State Governments
 National League of Cities



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BEING ARTFUL IN ADVOCACY

If you're someone who closely follows Congress or your state legislature, you have probably heard the expression, "There are two things you don't want to see being made—sausage and legislation." Clearly, the linking of the imagery between these two processes does not paint a pretty picture in one's mind of the legislative process... or sausage making – depending on your perspective.

While an ugly legislative process can still often produce sound public policy, the same does not hold true regarding a disjointed and messy advocacy effort. In order to be successful in the public policy arena, those advocating for a particular position must work together in concert – utilizing each group's specific strengths and talents to paint a compelling and thought-provoking argument.

Through leadership and working closely with the ASMBS State Chapters and members of the ASMBS State Advocacy Resource (STAR) Program, we hope to create "artful" advocacy approaches that will leave compelling and thought-provoking impressions on those that we are trying to influence.

ASMBS RAPID RESPONSE TEAM (ARRT)

The genesis of the ASMBS Rapid Response Team came after ASMBS and the Texas Chapter joined together with the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and other interested groups to address a threat to bariatric surgical coverage in Collin County, Texas. While we were unsuccessful in turning back this threat, we came out of this experience with a clear recognition of the need for establishing a formal process and strategy for addressing these kinds of issues in the future.

Such is the goal of the ASMBS Rapid Response Team (ARRT)—a new proactive advocacy initiative for our patients. The ARRT will help bring together and coordinate the talents and resources of our tremendous partners in patient care, surgery, medicine and industry toward our common goal of promoting and protecting patient access to bariatric surgery. In addition, the ARRT will ensure maximum involvement of the ASMBS State Chapters and STARs in this process so that all these groups are working together, in concert, toward this goal at the state, regional and national levels.

In the words of ASMBS President Scott Shikora (2008-2009), we must always educate, advocate, but never capitulate when it comes to championing the rights of our patients. In that spirit, the leaders of the ASMBS Rapid Response Team will always try to exhaust every diplomatic channel to protect these rights when working behind the scenes with policymakers and their staff. However, when diplomacy fails, we will not be tentative about employing more forceful advocacy tactics.



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State Advocacy Resource (STAR) Program

The purpose of the STAR Program is to support and communicate the mission and goals of the ASMBS before the state legislature and regulatory agencies. The STAR Program seeks individuals who are interested in volunteering their time and wish to make a strong impact in state advocacy initiatives. Responsibilities of STARs may include the following:

- Serve as scouts for the ASMBS at the local level in each state and territory of the United States—reporting back to both your ASMBS State Chapter and the National ASMBS Office when policy action is warranted in your respective state
- Voluntarily represent the ASMBS on state-based legislative and regulatory activities, such as monitoring legislation, meeting legislators and/or other elected or appointed officials, attending and/or testifying at legislative hearings
- Assist the ASMBS Regional Private Payor Liaison representing your region of the country by serving as the local resource regarding the bariatric surgery coverage policies of the major private health insurance plans providing health benefits to patients in your state.
- Establish relationships with our partners in patient care, medicine, surgery and industry.
- Function as a local spokesperson for the ASMBS with the local media



Surgery State Legislative Action Center (SSLAC)

The Surgery State Legislative Action Center (SSLAC) is a collaborative effort of the surgical specialty societies. The purpose of the Center is to engage surgeons to become involved in the legislative process at the state level—promoting initiatives that will enhance both quality of care and access to care for the surgical patient.

This web-based advocacy tool includes the capability for State Chapters to link directly to the SSLAC through a web sticker that can be easily integrated into the chapter's web site—allowing site visitors to contact their state legislature about issues or simply help them find out more about their elected leaders.

ASMBS State Chapter (ASC) Program

In addition to advancing the art and science of bariatric surgery, the ASMBS State Chapter Program was established to encourage the chapters to become the definitive voice for dealing with statewide issues surrounding quality of care and patient access to bariatric surgery. Working in conjunction with ASMBS, the chapters strive to protect the interests of patients and health care practitioners in both the state legislative and regulatory arenas.

“Growing partnerships and building relationships to promote and protect patient access to the comprehensive treatment approach for obesity that surrounds bariatric surgery.”

ASMBS Access to Care Committee Chair Robin Blackstone
MD, FASMBS, FACS

Regional Private Payor Liaison (RPPL) Program

In the April 2009 edition of ASMBS e-news, I spoke very passionately how we must always educate, advocate but never capitulate when it comes to championing the rights of our patients before the private payor community. I know all ASMBS members share this same passion and fight this battle every day on behalf of their patients. Unfortunately though, many of you lack the time, resources or guidance to personally engage the medical directors of the health plans in your area.

In an effort to alter this reality, I am pleased to announce that the ASMBS will be implementing a new program this summer—the Regional Private Payor Liaison (RPPL) Program. This new initiative will feature a special task force of six ASMBS members—each from a different geographic area of the country and each with a responsibility to educate and advocate on behalf of their patients before the key private payors in their region.

Much like the ripple that emanates from a stone cast into a pond, these Regional Private Payor Liaisons will slowly spread across the country with a goal of increasing patient access to reasonable and affordable coverage for bariatric surgical treatment and the multi-disciplinary care approach encompassed in our Centers of Excellence program.

While the RPPLs will provide the leadership and be the focal point for this initiative in their respective regions, they will not be acting alone. As the old saying goes, “All politics is local.” Much like visiting with legislators on Capitol Hill, your odds of really being heard on an issue often hinge on the messenger and, more importantly, whether or not that messenger is a constituent. While the Regional Private Payors Liaisons will have this on their side in their own states, they will need other ASMBS members to help carry the water in those areas where the RPPL is not a constituent of the health plan.



Please see the breakdown of the six geographic regions for the RPPL Program. If you, or someone you know, are knowledgeable about the private health plans in your area of the country, and you have the time and commitment to be a Regional Private Payor Liaison, please let us know. For more information about participating in the program, please contact ASMBS Public Policy Consultant Christopher Gallagher via email at chris@potomaccurrents.com.

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ASMBS President