



National Conference of Special Constituencies Recap
Ravi Shah, MD – GLBT caucus representative for Illinois

During my seven hours at the Kansas City airport, waiting for thunder storm back-ups at O'Hare to subside, I had plenty of opportunity to reflect on my first experience with AAFP's National Congress of Special Constituencies (NCSC).

Every year, five specific groups of AAFP members come together to meet, network, discuss issues important to family physicians, and pass resolutions they wish to see adopted by the AAFP during the fall's Congress of Delegates (COD). The groups include minorities, women, new physicians, international medical graduates, and GLBTs (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, and allies).

I represented the latter group, which selected me to serve as their Co-Convener -- one of the conference's leaders -- for next year's NCSC. I was subsequently selected by the entire NCSC coalition as an alternate delegate to the AAFP Congress of Delegates (COD) during the fall in Boston (and as full delegate in Denver next year).

I decided to volunteer as a member of a reference committee. Each of the resolutions written by my NCSC members first pass through one of five reference committees which triage the resolutions, recommending their adoption or not. The full body of NCSC attendees, during its business session, can either adopt the entire recommendations of each reference committee, or extract certain resolutions to be decided by everyone.

The reference committees include Advocacy (on which I served), Education, Health of the Public and Science, Organization and Finance, and Practice Enhancement.

Servicing on the Advocacy reference committee was a very cool time, like nothing I've experienced before. The first hour entailed sitting in the front of the designated room with four other volunteers (one from each of the constituencies) and the Chair of the reference committee, silently listening to testimony in favor and against each of the resolutions presented to our committee. We were not allowed to ask questions or speak for or against any of the resolutions.

After all the testimony was heard for each resolution, we were left for a private session where we discussed each resolution, debating the pros and cons of AAFP adoption. The resolutions we discussed in the Advocacy reference committee hit on a various controversial topics ranging throughout the policy spectrum: providing health care to undocumented individuals, ending health insurance exemptions for transgender patients,

repealing the ban on federal funding for abortions, supporting equal marriage rights for same gender couples, and temporary interstate medical licenses, to name just a few.

Abbas Hyderi, MD, another Illinois NCSC delegate (representing the minority constituency), submitted a resolution to our committee advocating for repealing the ban on federal funds towards elective terminations. The Advocacy Reference Committee on which I served recommended its adoption and there was no dissent when the entire NCSC body met.

Debating the resolutions gave each of us on the reference committee a chance to not only voice our opinions on the issues, but to really respectfully listen to everyone's points of view. On each resolution we eventually came to a consensus recommending its adoption or not, a feat that I thought was amazing considering the breadth of the issues and the diversity of the reference committee.

While I really enjoyed becoming engrossingly involved with various facets of the NCSC, the intangibles superseded all else. Meeting, collaborating, dining, and networking with proactive family physicians from around the county was, by far, the most enriching part of attending the NCSC. Each constituency had so many great people looking beyond the daily work of their own patient flow to advocate for all patients and family physicians.

I'm looking forward to not only attending next year's NCSC and collaborating with the diverse, forward-thinking group of physician attendees, but also being a leader as Co-Convener, working to make the NCSC even more productive and rewarding than before.