

Title: Dr.
First name: Nusheen
Last name: Ameenuddin
Institution: Mayo Clinic
Country: USA
City: Rochester
Phone: 1-507-284-2511
Email: ameenuddin.nusheen@mayo.edu
Method of presentation: oral presentation

Abstract title: Successful Advocacy for Children’s Health Policy by Pediatricians Using Social Media

Background: In summer of 2017, proposed cuts to Medicaid, the single largest health insurer for children in the US, threatened to eliminate access to care for millions. US pediatricians with the encouragement of our professional organization, the American Academy of Pediatrics, engaged in grassroots efforts to halt this damaging legislation to protect care for children, including those from immigrant and refugee families. An unprecedented level of activism poured out of pediatricians who used multiple communication channels, most prominently social media, to speak out for children. These efforts, along with those of a growing coalition, successfully created a wave of opposition to cutting critical health programs.

Method: The AAP examined statistics for pediatrician social media engagement during two designated Days of Action in June 2017. It also tracked published opinion pieces, pediatrician video testimonials and other means used by pediatricians to engage legislators and raise awareness among other physicians and the larger public about how policies proposed would irreparably harm children’s physical and mental wellbeing.

Results: Over 110 pediatricians from more than 30 states posted video testimonials to social media, primarily Twitter, explaining how Medicaid cuts would hurt our patients. This social media based effort struck a chord with the public. It was recognized and amplified by traditional media like the New York Times, Washington Post, as well as prominent activists and celebrities who shared these videos with wider audiences. A compilation video was created that has been viewed over 200,000 times. The video portion of the larger AAP campaign helped break walls and get the message out to change hearts and minds, ultimately contributing to change policy that was not pro-child.

Discussion: Social media presents a great opportunity to get messages out to the public and rally the masses without requiring an intermediary or gate keeper. Pediatricians interested in the holistic development of children and the provision of social policy that supports their overall health and wellbeing would be wise to harness the power of this new medium to educate and promote social change in health policy for children. As we witnessed one year ago, there is great power in numbers when pediatricians from across the country and world combine their voices for child welfare.

Authors, Institutions: Dr. Colleen Kraft, AAP President, encouraged submission of this abstract and continues to be instrumental in pediatrician advocacy efforts through social media, both through the AAP and at a grassroots level.