

WINSTON FELLOWSHIP REPORT: WEEK 4**July 10**Todd Spangler, BD

Mr. Spangler welcomed us to his office on Monday morning to discuss his time working on the Hill for both the Senate HELP Committee and the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. He described his pathway from Missouri, where he worked as a lobbyist for Ford Motor Company, to Capitol Hill, where he found himself at the center of pre-ACA health reform debates. Mr. Spangler advised us to always remember that “policy is implemented by a political mechanism,” and that what might seem like the policy solution to an expert in the field is often not politically feasible. We discussed the broad differences between the House and the Senate: He said the House continues to work as the framers had intended – driven foremost by public opinion – which results in a faster paced environment than the Senate, which he described as more “deliberative.” We spent the latter part of the meeting learning about BD and the government relations work Mr. Spangler does on cross-cutting corporate issues, such as FDA regulations (e.g., the user fees) and the ACA-initiated medical device tax. Mr. Spangler said the medical device tax stymies innovation because it inhibits venture capital investments in smaller companies more likely to partake in innovative research.

Cara James, Office of Minority Health, CMS

Dr. James provided us with a broad overview of the mission and objectives of the CMS Office of Minority Health as it was envisioned under the ACA and discussed the challenges of prioritizing the many areas that need the office’s focus. She said that the CMS equity plan has six priority areas that drive the office’s agenda: 1) data (collection, analysis, and reporting), 2) impact of CMS programs on disparities, 3) solutions to address disparities, 4) workforce issues, 5) improving communication needs, and 6) increased physical accessibility of medical facilities. Broadly, she said, one of her main objectives is to integrate disparities work into the CMS culture in such a way that the work could sustain itself even if OMH did not exist.

July 11Health Affairs Brief: Advanced illness and end-of-life care

I spent the morning at a *Health Affairs* briefing on advanced illness and end-of-life care. Because my study, “A positive association between hospice profit margin and the rate at which patients are discharged before death,” appeared in the July theme issue of the journal, I – along with the other first authors of studies in the issue – was asked to speak on a panel on hospice and palliative care. Although it was exciting to present my work in a public forum, I primarily enjoyed listening to the other authors describe their research and findings: This is an area of the care continuum that has long been neglected by researchers and policymakers, and it was exciting to hear about all of the interesting work that is now being conducted. I also enjoyed meeting many of the researchers I had cited in my doctoral dissertation!

Beth Pearson, Office of Sen. Elizabeth Warren

After the briefing, I hustled to Sen. Warren's office in the Hart building to meet with Beth Pearson, the office's health & economic policy advisor. We asked Dr. Pearson about her transition from being a fellow (she came to the Hill under the AAAS program) to a policy advisor. She said that throughout her tenure, she has valued the autonomy the office granted her, working primarily on oversight issues as a fellow and then shifting to poverty and economic policy and, finally, to health-related issues. She noted that her Ph.D. has served her well on the Hill, allowing her to cull peer-reviewed literature directly to combat counter-arguments to specific policy proposals. Utilizing the analytic toolbox she developed during her doctoral training, Dr. Pearson said she spends much of her time writing hearing questions, speeches the Senator delivers on health care, op-eds, and oversight products. We also discussed some of Sen. Warren's health policy priorities, including NIH funding (driven in part by the many medical research institutions in the state), opioids, and a drug-pricing package.

Peggy O'Kane and Paul Cotton, NCQA

It was an honor to sit down with Ms. O'Kane and Mr. Cotton and discuss the role of the NCQA in a health care environment that is increasingly shifting from volume to value. The founder and president of NCQA, Ms. O'Kane described her historical view of quality, emphasizing that we are still in the nascent stages of linking quality measures with reimbursement and that at the time NCQA was founded, most people thought they were "crazy" to be pushing quality. We also discussed NCQA's role on Capitol Hill, where, Mr. Cotton emphasized, the organization primarily acts as an independent, non-partisan briefing body. Sometimes, he said, NCQA promotes certain issues (e.g., CHIP quality metrics or inclusion of PCMH language in MACRA) but infrequently enough so that the organization is not considered a lobbyist. Finally, we touched on the challenges of creating appropriate quality measures that reflect the "whole" patient and diversity of experiences and needs. For example, there are significant gaps in measuring quality for behavioral health patients, and many of those patients have comorbid physical conditions that must be monitored in tandem.

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Jennifer DeAngelis, Office of Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse

Ms. DeAngelis enthusiastically described her job working for Sen. Whitehouse for the last nine years. Although Sen. Whitehouse is on the HELP and Aging committees, Ms. DeAngelis explained that the Senator's interests are broad and oftentimes overlap with the financing of services. We discussed the benefits – as well as the challenges – of working for a boss that is committed to health issues and incredibly well read on on-the-ground trends. Specifically, we discussed the bills the office has been drafting on programs for pre-hospice patients with advanced illness as well as patient safety (e.g., HAIs and HACs). For such issues, Ms. DeAngelis explained how her staff communicates and builds coalitions with experts and stakeholders in the fields to form a better understanding of the issues at play and develop informed solutions.

Taylor Hittle, Office of Rep. Markwayne Mullin

Ms. Hittle described the congressman's legislative victory from earlier in the day, when the FDA user fee reauthorization passed the House. In the bill, Rep. Mullin had worked on a bipartisan measure to ensure pediatric oncology drugs are tested on children through trials before they are broadly released on the market. Ms. Hittle was optimistic that the measure would also pass the Senate, where it has Sens. Rubio and Bennett as cosponsors. We also discussed the congressman's new position on the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health and, specifically, his role in launching the Indian Health Service Task Force, a bipartisan group that will be exploring an often overlooked federal program. Ms. Hittle explained the importance of this work to Rep. Mullin, who is one of two American Indians in Congress, and who represents a district that is 17 percent American Indian.

Dinner with Olivia Pham and Kripa Sreepada, former fellows

Olivia and Kripa graciously treated us to dinner at the Capitol Hill staple, Hawk 'n' Dove. We spent much of the dinner hearing about their new jobs and discussing their experiences with the fellowship – during both the interviewing period and their placements. Like others, they emphasized the importance of considering the “culture” of various offices when deciding on our placements, emphasizing that relationships are key to a positive experience on the Hill. It was incredibly helpful to talk about the Winston experience with the most recent graduates of the program.

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Susan Polan, APHA

Although we were disappointed Dr. Georges Benjamin was unable to attend our discussion due to a last-minute scheduling change, we had an excellent meeting with Dr. Polan, who described her experiences in DC starting as AAAS fellow on the Hill and how a series of fortuitous events resulted in her taking a job at APHA. Among other things, we talked about the challenges of working in an environment where cuts to the public health infrastructure are a major concern: In such an environment, she said it's crucial to ensure members of Congress understand the implications of such drastic changes – education is key. The silver lining, she said, is that such extreme cuts have increased public awareness and advocacy work on the ground.

HELP committee, minority staff

Our meeting with the HELP Committee's minority staff came at an interesting time – just at the moment Senate Republicans released their revised BCRA language. In light of that, we were grateful the committee held our meeting. We used the opportunity to get to know the health staff and learn about each member's unique portfolio (e.g., public health issues, women's health issues, opioids, mental health, workforce issues, aging, private insurance marketplaces, FDA, etc.). The staff described the benefits of working for Sen. Murray, who is not only a member of Senate leadership but who also represents a state often on the cutting edge of innovations in health care. We also learned that Sen. Murray does not employ health staff in her personal office, so HELP staff members also have exposure to issues in the personal office, providing them with incredible subject-matter versatility.

Marc Garufi, OMB

Mr. Garufi provided us with a well-rounded picture of the role of the OMB in the context of the policymaking process in the federal government. As neither Michael nor I had any prior OMB exposure, it was helpful to walk through the agency's organization chart with Mr. Garufi to get a better understanding of the agency's hierarchy and various roles, including the positions of appointees vs. career staffers. Mr. Garufi said OMB serves two major functions: 1) to develop and prepare the federal budget and 2) to work behind-the-scenes as an objective and non-partisan arbiter of the cost-effectiveness of particular policies. He described OMB's role as, often, the "bad cop" given its commitment to asking the tough questions – "Why?" "How?" "How much?" Mr. Graufi emphasized that career civil servants at OMB must be deeply committed to the mission of the organization: to improve health policy in a fiscally responsible way.

Dinner at David Abernethy's house

David and his wife Elizabeth welcomed us to their beautiful Capitol Hill home for dinner on Thursday evening. We loved hearing their stories about working on the Hill – and they prepared a delicious meal of shrimp and grits!

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Liz Fowler, Johnson & Johnson

We enjoyed meeting Dr. Fowler and hearing about her experiences working for the Senate Finance Committee leading up to and during passage of the ACA. Throughout the conversation, she reminded us of the importance of history: National health reform would have never happened had Medicare Part D not passed and Massachusetts' health reform not occurred. Those two pieces were vital in setting the stage for health reform, ensuring Democrats were all on the same page. We also discussed the 2008 White Paper that eventually led to the drafting of the ACA, which Dr. Fowler said allowed then-Sen. Baucus to test out different approaches to reform. Finally, we talked briefly about Dr. Fowler's current role at Johnson & Johnson, where she works on global health, sharing lessons learned from the ACA with clients around the world.

Suzanne Yurk, former fellow

We went to lunch with Ms. Yurk and discussed her time as a Winston Fellow – and the challenges of conducting all the interviews on her own, rather than with a partner – as well as her current role now as counsel for HHS in Region III. She described some of the cases she has worked on recently in the area of fraud and abuse, including negligent nursing homes and hospices inappropriately billing for patients ineligible for the benefit.

Nico Janssen, Office of Sen. Cantwell

Having met with the HELP minority staff and learned about their work for Sen. Murray on Thursday, it was nice to round out the week with a conversation with Mr. Janssen, who works for

the other Washington Senator – Sen. Cantwell. Mr. Janssen described his experiences working on the Hill since 2014, noting that everything is driven by the “3 P’s” – policy, process, and politics. We discussed some of the Senator’s priorities, including alternative payment models and home- and community-based services. Mr. Janssen said that much of his job involves research to support the Senator’s positions on particular policy issues.

Senate Finance Committee, minority staff

We finished our week by meeting the minority staff of the Senate Finance Committee. Naturally, we discussed the current BCRA Senate bill and the implications it has had on their current work and how it might impact their future work. We also discussed each staffer’s role on the committee and how a fellow might fit into the office.