

Weekly Report: 8/29 – 9/2
Olivia Pham

Monday August 29, 2016

The Commonwealth Fund Briefing – High-Need High-Cost Patients

A very informative and interesting briefing sponsored by the Commonwealth Fund and the Alliance for Health Reform. Panelists included Katherine Hayes, Marilyn Serafini, Karen Davis, Melinda Abrams and Dr. Paul Tomlin. It was also interesting to watch Rachel Nuzum direct the panel from the audience.

Stacy Cline Amin – HELP Committee (Majority)

After going over her role as Chief Counsel for the HELP Committee, Ms. Amin dove a little deeper into the act of investigation. Ms. Amin pointed out that the majority typically conducts oversight on agencies. It was a very interesting and informative meeting!

Tuesday August 30, 2016

Sara Rosenbaum – GWU

Ms. Rosenbaum was a really fascinating meeting. Having read so much of her work while I was school, it was wonderful to have the opportunity to meet with her in person! Since neither Kripa nor I have a background in law, Ms. Rosenbaum provided us with a short legal history of the ACA and the House v. Burwell case, which I had not heard about previously. She also spoke about Kentucky's Medicaid waiver, and said that the future of Kynect is truly in danger if the Governor Bevin has his way. Finally, Ms. Rosenbaum gave us the advice to “never lose our empathy” which is something that can happen very quickly in the policy world.

Kate Leone – Office of Senator Harry Reid

Our meeting with Ms. Leone was quite fun, she was such a delight! Ms. Leone spoke at length about her time working on health reform, as well as her history with Sen. Reid. It was amazing to learn about her work reconciling the Senate health reform bills from each committee, and how hard she worked during this time period. She concluded by giving us some general advice about entering the Hill – she was very candid and I appreciated this very much.

Vice Admiral Dr. Vivek Murthy – Office of The Surgeon General

What an honor! While we talked about many things in this meeting, I would like to detail a more personal story. I am from Oklahoma, where opioid addiction has been a problem for over 20 years. Our communities of color, especially Native American reservations, struggle with finding resources to combat drug abuse. I grew up with many people who used opioids in high school and eventually became addicted (their parents were usually addicts as well), and I know people in my small town who died from their addiction. Even though I knew this would be a prickly question, I asked the Surgeon General why opioid addiction only became a crisis when white Midwestern women started to die (of course, I asked this as respectfully as I could). His answer was so very compassionate, and showed that he understood the rightful anger that these forgotten communities feel. He essentially said that in his role, he had to try to find the bridges to make people care for one another, and that is through our shared experience as human beings. He tries to find human connection in every public health cause, because public health belongs to all people. While there can be no easy answer to my question, I was really touched that he responded to it not with defensiveness or dismissiveness, but with compassion. This was truly a memorable meeting for me and reminds me of why I chose health policy as my career path.

Ashely Ridlon – BPCAN

Our meeting with Ms. Ridlon, more than anything, was a deeper look at long-term care and aging issues that may come up in the next year. Ms. Ridlon emphasized the legislative importance of CMMI demos and drug prices.

Wednesday August 31, 2016

Dr. Mai Pham – CMMI

Dr. Pham is a physician who focused much of her practice on the underserved and uninsured population before entering the policy sphere. While our meeting was short, she was able to speak to us about the ACO demonstrations, which are part of her portfolio. When we pressed her about the success or failure of ACOs, she stated that it was still very early in the demonstrations to give a black and white answer. She also mentioned that not every system should be an ACO, and that not every patient should be in an ACO. She also spoke a little bit about the future of these models, which include the refinement of Next Gen and ACO functioning.

Jenelle Krishnamoorthy, Bob Filipone – Merck

Unfortunately, Ms. Krishnamoorthy could not join us until the last few minutes of our meeting but we still had an interesting meeting with Mr. Filipone. He told us of his background in intelligence and how it thoroughly prepared him for working on global drug policy. He also explained how Merck operates on a global scale and how global business affects the US business. He also went into the tax system and desire for reform that affects his company, which went a little over my head. I would love to learn more about this topic and will do some further reading.

Thursday September 1, 2016

Eric Waskowicz – Office of Senator Shaheen

Mr. Waskowicz has only been in Sen. Shaheen's office a very short time, but he was able to give us a good layout of the priorities of the office. Sen. Shaheen is still highly interested in the opioid crisis, and attempted to get an emergency funding package passed as part of CARA. She is also involved in diabetes, home health care, and reproductive health issues. Learning about how to take a stand on a very controversial issue like reproductive rights seems to be a game of balance, and "taking what you can get" while acknowledging that it isn't enough.

Tim Gronniger, Dr. Aditi Mallick – CMS

Mr. Gronniger has worked in many parts of government, so it was wonderful to learn his different perspectives of health care and how they influence his work today. He acts mainly in a supportive role to Andy Slavitt, but has his own "projects" including drug policy and MACRA. Dr. Mallick, who is an internist but has recently taken a dive into health policy, gave us an in-depth look at MACRA and told us the goalposts CMS has laid out to eventually get 100% of participating providers into an AAPM. They both acknowledged that there will always be a place for FFS, but there will be glide paths to help most providers transition.

Friday September 2, 2016

Jennifer Cannistra - Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, ASPE

Ms. Cannistra spent some time speaking to us about ASPE and her role within the department. ASPE is the "internal think tank" which does evaluation and policy coordination in more areas than I had previously imagined! We asked about the process

by which ASPE selects its research topics, and how the agency interacts with the White House and the Secretary's office. Ms. Cannistra also shared with us her experience with the ACA and the subsequent Supreme Court cases intended to repeal it. It w fascinating to learn in better detail the legal arguments against the ACA and how the law was defended.

Note: As of this week, Kripa and I have decided on our placements! I will be heading to the Energy and Commerce committee in September. I am very happy about this decision and can't wait to begin the next portion of the fellowship. We celebrated our placements by taking ourselves to lunch at Amsterdam Falafel in L'Enfant station (it was delicious)!