

Weekly Report: 8/8 – 8/12

Olivia Pham

Monday August 8, 2016

Lisa Potetz, Beth Fuchs, Jean Hearne – Health Policy Alternatives

Our meeting with these three women was excellent – it was a wonderful opportunity to hear about their experiences in research, on MedPAC, and in Medicare. After discussing their own backgrounds, they described the issues they would be working on as an organization. Some of these issues include drug pricing and health IT. They also discussed the opioid crisis and state funding of the ACA as two other issues at which to look forward. Finally, we discussed placement opportunities on the Hill. Each woman agreed that committee work would be the best for this particular year, and it would provide us the best opportunity to work on policy.

Dr. Paul Ginsburg – Brookings Institution

Dr. Ginsburg spoke at length about his long and fascinating career in DC. Having been at the forefront of major change in the health sphere, he told us about his time at CBO, RAND, and then the integration of ProPAC into MedPAC. He also detailed founding his own think tank (HSC) and his work at Brookings. More than anything, this was a chance to hear the story of someone who is so well respected and well experienced in health policy. These are my favorite type of meetings.

Amy Hall, Melanie Egorin, Sarah Levin – House Committee on Ways and Means

This was our follow-up meeting with the committee - we were unable to complete a full meeting during the first week of our fellowship. At this meeting each woman detailed her portfolio, then discussed the fellowship placement in their office. It appears that they really do treat their fellow as another staffer, and that they aim to nurture their staffers. In the coming months, the health team expects to work on issues including ACA improvements, CHIP, interoperability, Zika, and 21st Century Cures. I was really inspired by this meeting and will be having a formal interview with the health team in two weeks.

Erin Richardson – Former Fellow, Domestic Policy Council

Our late dinner with Erin was truly informative and eye opening to the world of policy work. She spoke at length about her time as a fellow on the Finance committee, as well as her time in the administration. She stressed the importance of finding a good mentor. It is important to find someone who not only nurtures you and helps you grow, but also inspires you (which I am sure she has found in Jeanne Lambrew). While it is no doubt because she has so much responsibility at the White House, Erin is essentially working 14 hours a day. This was a real shock to me, but she is incredibly passionate about her work and doesn't see these hours as a burden. Perhaps knowing that she will be moving on soon makes the working hours seem much less severe.

Tuesday August 9, 2016

Charlene McDonald – Office of Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer

Ms. McDonald has a more political background than most people we have met, so learning about how she applies that background to policy and the Whip's office was very interesting. Ms. McDonald closed the meeting by providing us with some excellent advice for working on the hill.

Marilyn Tavenner, Matt Eyles, Aryana Khalid – America's Health Insurance Plans

What an honor to speak with Ms. Tavenner! To hear her speak about her time as a CMS administrator, taking over Dr. Berwick's framework, and implementing the ACA was amazing. It was also great to hear from her less than two days before her interview with Dan Diamond on Pulse Check was released. The podcast filled in some areas of the story that we did not have the time to cover. Of course, Ms. Tavenner spoke on the priorities of AHIP, which overall seem to point to continued refinement of the ACA and the exchanges. Hearing how she brought Ms. Khalid with her from CMS really emphasizes the importance of finding a good supervisor who will invest in you.

Wednesday August 3, 2016

John Benevoli – Office of Civil Rights, HHS

This meeting was meant to be with Suzanne Yurk, but unfortunately she was caught up in several other meetings. Mr. Benevoli spoke to us about the Office of General Counsel, its structure, and its purpose. He personally works on HIPAA implementation, which I had never thought of in the civil rights context before. It was a good reminder that access issues extend beyond accessing medical care – patients also need access to their health information. It was really fascinating to learn the process by which rules are implemented and how OGC interacts with agencies in that process. This is actually great preparation for our future meeting with Suzanne - hopefully she can fill in more details related to health policy.

Dr. Karen DeSalvo – Acting Assistant Secretary for Health, HHS

Though our meeting with Dr. DeSalvo was brief, we learned so much from her. We learned about the role of the Assistant Secretary. We also learned about her focus on health IT as the National Coordinator, and how interoperability is on the very near horizon (especially with innovations in coding language). It was an interesting coincidence that we spoke to her the day before it was announced she was relinquishing her position at ONC.

Thursday August 4, 2016

Ray Quintero – American Osteopathic Association

Mr. Quintero has a really unique perspective. This is the first time we spoke more in-depth about workforce issues, and we learned about some of the issues that osteopaths face. Student debt, GME, and payment delivery reform are all at the forefront. Mr. Quintero also spoke about his experience, and provided us with advice on how to become successful on the Hill.

Self-Guided White House Tour

Cat Oakar was kind enough to arrange a self-guided tour of the East Wing for Kripa and me. It was a wonderful experience! The White House is so much smaller in real life than in the movies, but it is beautiful nonetheless.

Dr. Amber Willink – Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Dr. Willink, who has a really interesting journey in (global) health policy, was a wonderful person to meet with. Her work in long-term care and innovative care models is so interesting, and I enjoyed hearing how she plans on translating the results of her work to policy. Even though she is an academic, she emphasizes the importance of making your work relevant and keeping one foot in the policy world. I really appreciated that Dr. Willink asked us our opinion of the role of research in health policy, and am so encouraged that she agreed with us on multiple points. I am determined to not lose touch with my roots in policy research, and Dr. Willink is proof that one can work in multiple spheres without losing parts of your professional identity.

Friday August 5, 2016

Jordan Bartolomeo – Office of Senator Johnny Isakson

Our meeting with Ms. Bartolomeo was short, but in that time we were able to learn about her career experience and her path to the Hill. She spoke on Sen. Isakson's priorities in health, including the chronic care working group, caregiving bills, a home infusion bill, and a focus on rural health. As a HELP and Finance committee member, Sen. Isakson has quite a bit of influence on health policy. He is also very involved in public health policy since the CDC is in his state – he is a strong advocate for their funding.

Clyde Behney, Chelsea Frakes – National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Math

In this meeting we were able to gain an understanding of the structure of NASEM and the role of the National Academy of Medicine. I think they are in a very unique position in that they do not allow funders to be part of the research process, and that they must respond to any initiative put forth by the government (even though they are not part of the

government itself). We discussed the role of research in the policy-making process, as well as the roundtables they hold each year. We asked about NASEM signing on to the 17 science questions posed to the presidential candidates. Mr. Behney stated that it was an effort to generate interest in science though it wouldn't really initiate a scientific debate between the candidates.

Dr. Len Nichols – George Mason University

Dr. Nichols took us through his very long career in policy, which has rotated through several incarnations of research, academia, and policy. We asked him what he found to be most important throughout his career, and he emphasized the necessity of human relationships in policymaking. He told us several stories about how Sen. Ted Kennedy was essential in several major policy reforms, and that he was only able to do so because he made an effort to build relationships. It was really sad, but humanizing (and rather beautiful), to hear how Sen. Hatch mourned Sen. Kennedy's death. We also spoke for a time on the future of the ACA and long-term care.