AMT monitors the legislative “pulse”

A merican Medical Technologists (AMT) is somewhat unique among laboratory organizations in that it serves the dual roles of a certifying body and a professional membership association that provides its members an important benefit in the form of legislative monitoring and advocacy. AMT enjoys an excellent member-retention rate, especially in its MT and MLT membership categories — a testament that the organization successfully promotes its members’ professional interests.

Federal legislation

AMT’s advocacy regarding federal legislation is handled on a top-down pyramidal basis, whereby policy decisions are made by a centralized national committee and lobbying is conducted through a combination of activity in Washington, DC, and grassroots contacts in the states. AMT’s Federal/Government Affairs committee includes a chair and 14 members representing key states throughout the nation.

The committee chair and AMT’s legal counsel work with the Clinical Laboratory Coalition (CLC) in Washington to develop positions and strategies on federal legislation and to promote the lab industry’s interests regarding reimbursement issues. AMT members have become increasingly aware that national reimbursement policies have a profound “trickle-down” effect on their own pocketbooks.

Once AMT develops its official position on relevant legislation, it posts action alerts on its website and disseminates advocacy points and a list of grassroots contacts, which the organization has developed in recent years, to the leadership of its 33 active state societies. While individual members may not fully appreciate the importance of their voices, a recent example demonstrates the effectiveness of grassroots efforts.

This spring, the office of Rep. Phil English (R-PA) asked the CLC to help recruit co-sponsors for the Medicare Laboratory Services Access Act of 2005 (HR 2218) — a bill English introduced to update the Medicare specimen-collection fee. On behalf of the CLC, AMT asked its Texas state society to help solicit members of the House of Representatives’ Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means committees. With only a few phone calls by AMT member constituents to the offices of Reps. Michael Burgess (R-TX) and Gene Green (D-TX), the CLC secured commitments by those key committee members to co-sponsor HR 2218.

Currently, AMT’s top federal policy priorities are as follows:

- Defeat any initiative to impose copayments for Medicare lab services;
- Support enactment of HR 2218 and the Clinical Laboratory Personnel Shortage Act (HR 1175);
- Ensure that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ Demonstration Project for Competitive Bidding of Clinical Laboratory Services addresses concerns regarding preservation of testing quality, access, and competition; and
- Halts or slow implementation of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission’s recommendation to require lab result values with all Medicare claims.

State legislation

When it comes to state legislation, the pyramid model works in reverse, from the bottom up. AMT relies heavily on its state societies to watch for state bills and regulations that impact AMT’s allied health disciplines. Each state society has a legislative chair in charge of developing contacts with key staffers on pertinent committees of the state legislature. Once a state society identifies a bill or regulation of interest, it notifies AMT’s national State Legislative Committee. This committee lends advocacy assistance to the state societies and ensures that the message conveyed to state legislators is consistent with AMT national policy.

AMT has had several recent successes at the state level. Earlier this year, a bill was introduced in the Kentucky Senate (SB 20) to require certification of phlebotomists. Although AMT generally supports phlebotomist certification, the bill, sponsored by the state nurses’ association, included a number of unacceptable provisions. The legislative chair of AMT’s Kentucky society became aware of the bill shortly after its introduction and arranged a meeting the same week with the speaker of the Kentucky House of Representatives. The speaker assured her that the bill would not pass as introduced.

AMT state-level involvement also contributed to the temporary defeat of a Florida competitive-bidding proposal to acquire Medicaid lab services statewide from a single provider. AMT’s Pennsylvania society is currently working with an industry coalition to help derail a proposal to charge Medicaid participants a co-payment for lab services. AMT is also active in state licensure regulations.

AMT will continue to trumpet its members’ interests in Washington and at the state level.