



Editorial

Everyday advocacy[☆]

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords
 Advocacy
 DEI
 Diversity
 Inclusion
 Wellness

ABSTRACT

When considering advocacy, many people think of the political fundraising form, and assume it is difficult to carry out, or that it requires a big investment of time, energy, or money. However, advocacy comes in many different forms, and can be implemented every day. A more mindful approach and a few small, but critical, steps can take our advocacy to a new, more intentional level; one that we can practice every day. There are many opportunities to use our advocacy skills every day to stand up for something that matters and to make advocacy a habit. It will take all of us working together to rise to the challenge and make a difference in our specialty, for our patients, in our society and in our world.

1. Introduction

The term “advocacy” comes from the Latin stem of ‘advocare’ and literally means to “add” a “voice.” Advocacy can be thought of as any action that pleads for a cause, recommends or defends an action, or supports others or even ourselves. To be effective, advocacy isn't simply an act of voicing support; it must be followed with clear, intentional actions to garner support and build momentum for positive change.^{1,2}

When considering advocacy, many people think of the political fundraising form, and assume it is difficult to carry out, or that it requires a big investment of time, energy, or money. However, advocacy comes in many different forms, and can be implemented every day. In fact, most of us already advocate for something or someone every day. We may be advocating for our patients by implementing changes to improve imaging quality or patient experience. Or we may advocate for more effective mentoring programs within our institutions. We advocate for our colleagues at times of academic promotion or advancement into new leadership roles. A more mindful approach and a few small, but critical, steps can take our advocacy to a new, more intentional level; one that we can practice every day. In the era of social media, we must highlight that its use provides a unique modern method to advocate for a cause, others (including our patients) and oneself.

2. Types of everyday advocacy

2.1. Advocacy for oneself

Self-advocacy is defined as the ability to speak up for oneself in an effective manner.³ This is especially important in our place of work, when decisions are being made on our behalf that can impact our well-

being. However, many of us feel uncomfortable advocating for ourselves. This is a learned behavior, and not everyone has had exposure to effective self-advocacy to model it appropriately. Over time, you can develop the skill of speaking up for yourself in a more effective way.

One of the first steps in becoming a better self-advocate is to understand oneself fully. This sense of self is captured by the Japanese concept of “*ikigai*”. This term is defined as “a motivating force – something or someone that gives a person a sense of purpose or a reason for living”.⁴ First, consider what gives you the greatest sense of accomplishment. This not only includes your day-to-day work, but also, all the elements in your personal life that are part of your work-life integration. What matters most – and why? Once you identify these priorities, and things which give you the greatest sense of purpose, you can begin to consider how those play into your strengths and contributions.

An important step in identifying potential areas of personal growth is by establishing a support system of diverse mentors and sponsors. Sometimes referred to as the “kitchen cabinet”,⁵ this should include a group of colleagues at various stages in their careers, with different perspectives and backgrounds, who can fulfill your needs in distinctive ways.⁶ This group should all be genuinely honest with their feedback and have your best interests at heart. Include mentors at various career stages, one that has met the challenges that come with a similar career and at least one other that may be at an earlier career stage that can see your hurdles with a fresh perspective. Lastly, enlisting someone who is likely to disagree with you ensures you have not built an “echo chamber” of your own thoughts and opinions.

At times, it becomes necessary to directly communicate your needs to ultimately advocate for oneself. When doing this, you should do so in a way that gets the greatest return for your ask. Communicate your value within these discussions as well as your needs and rights. This can be

[☆] At the time of writing, Dr. Kotsenas serves on the Board of Chancellors at the American College of Radiology as Council Speaker. Drs. Smith and Artunduaga have no conflicts of interest to declare.

especially challenging for women who are self-advocating. Gender differences in negotiation exist. While historically it has been reported that women are less assertive or do not ask for what they want directly, women who self-advocate are often perceived as too assertive and may experience a negative reaction from the other party.^{7–9} These biases can be difficult to tackle as they may be intrinsic in supervisors or even within an institution. Everyone can work towards eliminating bias by raising standards – for example, by ensuring negotiations are structured in a more equitable way. The recognition of these negotiating inequalities by all of us is the first step in combatting them.

When communicating needs, it helps to prepare ahead of time. Spend the time doing your research and consult your panel of mentors. Drafting your communication ahead of time can be helpful, as well as practicing with an ally acting as a tough negotiator. When the time comes, it can be helpful to begin the communication with open ended questions to ensure the person you are negotiating with feels invited into a conversation. And, as a good rule in many aspects of life – always assume good intent.³ Lastly, know that a “no” is not a dead end in a negotiation. Strive to get to yes with a new adjusted proposal based on the feedback you have received as appropriate.

2.2. Advocacy for others

Currently, women represent >50% US medical students – however, only 27% of radiologists are women.¹⁰ The statistics for underrepresented minorities – especially African Americans – are even more discouraging. Additional minority communities in radiology include international medical graduates (IMGs), Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine (DOs), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) providers.¹¹ To promote an inclusive culture that welcomes these providers, eventually increasing our future recruitment and diversity, we must strive to be better allies and practice everyday advocacy for others.

The first, and simplest way, in which we can advocate for others every day is by using a strategy known as “amplification”. Research has shown that women are far more likely to be interrupted – by both men and women – and women are more often given less credit, or even penalized, for speaking out.¹² To combat workplace biases, underrepresented women White House aides began “amplifying” each other during President Obama’s first term. When a woman made a key point, another woman would repeat it, and give credit to its author. This approach forced others in the room to recognize the first woman’s contribution. This action resulted in Obama and others calling on women more frequently during meetings – and even resulted in greater representation of women aides during Obama’s second term.¹³ This strategy is a useful tactic that can be easily utilized in day-to-day practice to combat inherent biases in our workplaces.

A microaggression is a comment or an action that subtly and often unintentionally demonstrates prejudice against a minority or marginalized group.¹⁴ Some have proposed these be referred to as “subtle actions of exclusion”, as these are often not expressed in an intentionally aggressive way. To advocate for others who may be affected by these subtle acts, we must address them in a strategic manner. Many organizations are now teaching upstander techniques such as the 5 D’s (Direct, Delegate, Distract, Delay and Document) to help address these acts, which is a critical component of everyday advocacy.¹⁵ It’s important that when intervening, we do so in a manner that is empowering, amplifying, and advocating and not necessarily a “rescue”.

A final way in which we can advocate for others is through sponsorship. While mentors are valuable for providing advice to their mentees, sponsors are influential professionals who support and nominate individuals (protégés) for specific opportunities.¹⁶ Because sponsorship serves to increase the individual’s visibility to expertise or leadership, a sponsor must be knowledgeable of and oftentimes higher up within the leadership structure of an organization.¹⁷

Research has shown that women and those under-represented in

medicine may be over-mentored and under-sponsored. That is, they receive a lot of well-meaning advice, but fewer opportunities. For example, a survey published in *The Harvard Business Review* showed that 78% of men were mentored by a CEO or senior executive, compared to only 69% of women.¹⁸ Women’s mentors are less often high-level leaders, which puts women at a disadvantage when the time comes for those mentors to potentially act as sponsors. Some organizations have implemented structured sponsorship programs, such as training sponsors on the complexities of gender and leadership. While such institution-wide changes may be out of our control, we can do our part by “paying it forward” and sponsoring others as we gain leadership roles within our institutions and organizations. In this arena, social media can play a key role to network and increase access to mentors/sponsors from other institutions, other specialties, or even, other fields/industries.²⁰

Sponsorship can be achieved by implementing the ABCD’s of sponsorship.¹⁹ First, by practicing “Amplification”, as previously discussed. Second, by “Boosting” the individual we wish to sponsor. This includes nominating an individual for an invited lecture, an award, or a leadership role, or even simply writing a letter of recommendation. “Connecting” is another way in which a sponsor can elevate an individual. When a high-power sponsor makes a connection, the sponsor is claiming an association with this individual, which can enhance others’ first impressions. Lastly, it is important for a sponsor to “Defend” as well. This involves addressing misperceptions often rooted in unconscious bias that may cause a qualified candidate to initially be dismissed. This is an opportunity for a sponsor to utilize their political capital and plays a vital role in moving people forward in an equitable manner.¹⁹

2.3. Advocacy for a cause

Many believe that advocacy for a cause is difficult to carry out and will require a large investment of time and effort. Some think it is only about fundraising or national politics. In our current environment with ubiquitous social media, it often seems to require a large public stage and a virtual megaphone. Some simply conclude that advocacy is too challenging to impact real change. In reality, advocacy for a greater cause may only require a small effort from many people. Whether you are advocating for something small and local or large and global, there are a few simple steps to achieving success.

First, identify your cause or opportunity. What is the problem you are trying to solve or the issue you intend to address?

Second, take time to research the issue at hand. Ensure you have all the relevant facts. Doing your research will also allow you to assemble the necessary resources to support future communication and education efforts, and to identify the key decision makers you will want to reach with your message.

Third, get organized. Set clear goals. Develop a step-by-step action plan on a realistic time schedule. Build grass-roots support.

Fourth, educate and communicate effectively with the decision makers identified in step two. Include those who have influence on the decision makers such as members of the public or members of other like-minded groups or organizations. The information gathered in the first step will be key to crafting your message. Know and understand the opposing point of view and the factors likely to influence decisions in your favor. Understand where individuals you wish to influence get their information from and use those channels to communicate. Utilize social media when needed in order to broaden your reach.

Finally, connect with other like-minded individuals. Collaborate in the broadest sense. This will add strength to your numbers and establish strong coalitions for long-term success.

If you are in medicine, you are in politics. Federal and state governments can have many impacts on the practice of medicine that go beyond issues related to reimbursement. The American College of Radiology (ACR) is an organization that focuses on advocacy and health policy. ACR caucuses provide an initial forum to discuss issues that matter to our profession and patients, to spread awareness and expand

support amongst members around resolutions on these important issues created by ACR councilors, state chapters, the Resident and Fellow section, the Young Professionals Section, Council Steering Committee or Board of Chancellors. The ACR also organizes an annual Capitol Hill Day for radiologists to meet with their members of Congress to advocate for those issues that are important to us and our patients at the federal legislative level.

3. Conclusion

There are many opportunities to use our advocacy skills every day to stand up for something that matters and to make advocacy a habit. It will take all of us working together to rise to the challenge and make a difference in our specialty, for our patients, in our society and in our world.

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