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NOTES FOR ACTIVISTS PNHP LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

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“FINDING YOUR NICHE IN ACTIVISM”



1. THE FIRST RULE OF ACTIVISM IS TO “USE YOUR TALENTS.”

If you are writer, write. If you prefer speaking (most physicians do) speak. If you like to entertain, hold a “house party.” If you are a cartoonist (e.g. Rex Morgan, MD), put single payer in your cartoon.

Some things you can learn to do (e.g. fundraising and speaking), and to overcome fears, but having fun is more important than most people realize. It’s difficult to get people to volunteer their time to do something they don’t enjoy, find relatively easy, and meaningful.

2. “START WHERE YOU ARE”

We find that once a person becomes active, they find it relatively easy to keep going. Speakers get invited to speak again. Health reporters phone and ask questions. There are always new reasons to write a letter to the editor. But it can be difficult to get started as an activist. So we say, “Start where you are.”

Your specialty, physician group, and local hospital are sources of potential speaking engagements and writing opportunities: Grand Rounds, informal bag lunches, specialty conferences, newsletters and journals, etc.

Any place you already go to hear speakers, and already read for your health care news, is a potential place for you to reach others.

Your community is a source of contacts with local media and potentially supportive civic groups (League of Women Voters, Rotary Clubs, unions, churches, senior centers, even book clubs). If you are new to activism, speaking to grassroots groups can help you overcome any doubts or fears because the public is, generally speaking, so eager to hear

about this issue. Don't underestimate how exciting and empowering it is for a public audience to hear a physician say "health care should be a right."

Physicians can usually get a lunch meeting with the local paper's health/business reporter (small papers usually use the AP wire for health policy stories, so you may try to meet with the AP reporters for your region) and editorial writers/Board. You can ask to meet with them yourself or invite another PNHP speaker (perhaps someone coming to town to give a Grand Rounds).

3. USE YOUR NETWORK OF FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND CONTACTS.

Physicians are more likely to know businesspeople and have influential political contacts than other activists. Use your connections! We are in particular need right now for small and large business support for single payer. Would a business owner you know be willing to talk to a reporter about why we need a single payer system? Invite you to speak at his annual business convention?

Do you know someone running for office? Offer to be their health policy advisor, or to come in and meet with them about effective health care reform. Meet with your national and state legislators to educate them and their health aides on national health insurance, but don't get hung up on them. In general, "politicians are followers, not leaders. If we create momentum for change, they will follow, but they won't lead."

Many people/physicians can contribute financially to this movement easier than they can volunteer. It is a privilege to have the resources to make a financial donation, and it makes people feel good to be able to help. Don't deprive them of the opportunity to contribute.

4. WORK AT A SUSTAINABLE PACE – FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.

Although some activists are retired, and some are able to travel long distances to speak and meet, most people will need to fit in their activism with job, family, kids, hobbies, chores, and other volunteer activities. "This is a long-term struggle, so we don't want to ask people to work at a pace they can't sustain over many years." Thus, the closer the fit between your daily life and your single payer efforts, the easier it is to stay involved over the long-term.
