How to be an effective advocate

What is Advocate?
An advocate is a person who takes positive action to support a cause which results in a desired change. As an advocate you express your opinions because you feel strongly about a particular issue and recognize that fact that action is necessary to make people aware of the facts in order to effect change. One target of advocacy is government policy. You can influence government policy through effective communication with your elected officials, the media and other influential leaders.

General Techniques for Effective Advocacy

Identify yourself -- No one is going to give your position any consideration unless they know who you are. Therefore it is most effective to express your position or opinion in a signed letter or email. Write as you would to a personal friend or associate and identify yourself by including your name, address and telephone number in all correspondence. By letting your representatives in Congress or the media know who you are, they will pay attention to what you have to say. If it relates to the issue you may also include such information as that you are a parent, teacher, professor, doctor, lawyer, owner of a business, member of a church or other organization, etc.

Be Specific -- Be as specific as possible. Many people may not be as familiar as you are with the particular issue, so try to clearly describe the issue. Then state your position and any related goals.

Make Your Position Personal -- As a citizen advocate, telling your story is the best way to provide a meaningful impact when you express your position. This is very important on issues related to the heart, as is the case in most issues related to the health, education and welfare of children. Try to use personal, individual examples from your own life experience and speak with the maturity and authority which such experience brings.

Reflect Confidence -- No one is going to give your opinion the time of day if you grope around and say, "I think" this or "I guess" that. Be emphatic. Say that "My experience has proven to me..." or "I know for a fact that this is true." When you express confidence in your position people will gain understanding and be more likely to come share your position. Because of your experience you may very well know more about an issue than elected officials, media, and medical professionals.

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Never Be Rude -- Make a point to always be very polite and respectful. After all we live in the United States of America and everyone has a right to their own position. This means there will always be at least two sides to any position. Thus as an advocate your job is to use reason, to present the facts, to suggest actions and solutions, to help solve a problem and to motivate others to take action on your behalf. If you are impolite no one is going to want to listen to anything you have to say and your time and effort will just be wasted.

Highlight Profound Issues -- Every newspaper and major media new report focuses upon profound issues. There is a reason for this. It is profound, often shocking news, which gets people's attention, arouses their emotions and causes them to take action. Therefore you should focus upon profound issues when you write, especially to your representatives. For example, it is a fact that over one million people die each year from mosquito borne disease, four million babies die the first month of their life, and another four million babies are stillborn! These are issues which are so shocking that cannot be ignored. It is such profound and critical issues you should point out.

Be Brief and to the Point -- You may feel very strongly about an issue and want to write a book about it, but it will help if you can state your position clearly in as few words as possible. A good advocacy letter is only one page long and 250 to 300 words. You should say in the first paragraph when, where, what, how and why with respect to the issue at hand. Keep to the point. Stick to one issue per correspondence. Focus narrowly and strongly upon one issue to be most effective.

Relate to Timely Topics -- Whatever issue you are addressing, try to make it relevant to current events. For example, since you are writing about quinolone toxicity, you may research how many people have died in the last year from drugs reactions and how many lives might have be saved with better oversight. The more relevant your issue is, the more likely it is to receive consideration.

Support Your Position with Facts when Possible -- As already stated, you need to support your position with facts, data and statistics. Try to make sure the information you provide is accurate and up to date. Search the Internet for articles and report related to the issue you want to write about; then when you express your opinion you will be able to back it up with facts and figure which will make more people listen to what you have to say. One of the QVF’s main functions is to gather the facts needed to represent quinolone toxicity in professional manner.