

BJD GLOBAL NETWORK CONFERENCE 2009

The USBJD hosted the annual Bone and Joint Decade Global Network Conference and Patient Advocacy Meeting, October 21-24, 2009, in Washington, DC. This was the USBJD's major undertaking in 2009, and represented the first time in history such a broad-based assemblage of musculoskeletal organizations met in the United States.

With a Host Committee of more than 100 Senators, Congressional Leaders, and Ambassadors, the conference brought together musculoskeletal healthcare professionals and patients from 56 countries and their BJD National Action Networks, as well as more than 40 USBJD participating organizations, many represented by their leadership. In total 329 delegates attended. This high profile event provided a special opportunity to showcase musculoskeletal health.

The two primary goals of the conference were to raise awareness and advocate for musculoskeletal health, and to develop a roadmap for the future to build on the momentum created by the Bone and Joint Decade.

Nearly 200 patients, patient advocates, and healthcare professionals gathered for Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill, Thursday, October 22. Congressmen Charlie Melancon (D-LA) and Dave Camp (R-MI) addressed delegates during the morning, as well as Former Assistant Surgeon General of the United States, Rear Admiral Susan Blumenthal, MD. Delegates then participated in a training session and review of the main advocacy messages developed for the day in preparation for their meetings with congressional leaders.

The key messages focused on:

- 1) Increasing awareness about the burden of musculoskeletal disease
- 2) Access to healthcare
- 3) Funding for research, prevention, and rehabilitation programs

At lunch Senators John Barrasso, MD (R-WY), and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) addressed participants, who then spent the afternoon meeting with congressional leaders and their staff. One hundred patients and their families attended a session of the patient seminar *Experts in Arthritis*, sponsored and introduced by Congresswoman Anna Eshoo (D-CA), where a panel of seven leading expert healthcare professionals answered their questions.

On Friday and Saturday leading experts addressed the burden of disease, advances in research, prevention and care management developments over the last ten years and opportunities for the future, covering osteoarthritis, inflammatory conditions, back pain, bone health and osteoporosis, and trauma. There were also sessions on: how advances in treating military casualties are leading to opportunities for civilian application; rehabilitation of victims of the Sechuan earthquake in China last year; how the Ponseti International Association has used the Decade to expand awareness and the training of the Ponseti method for treating clubfoot around the world; how to advance the health policy agenda for musculoskeletal conditions. Participants in the USBJD's Young Investigator Initiative program displayed posters of their work.

These sessions provided the foundation for the rest of the conference, strategic planning for beyond the Decade. Six multidisciplinary groups of experts from the U.S. and around the world had spent the months leading up to the conference identifying the issues and priorities affecting lowering the burden of musculoskeletal disease and developing plans to address each priority. These plans were discussed by delegates during the conference who were charged with reviewing and prioritizing the issues, and are to be published. The pre-conference documents prepared by the groups are included in the conference program, starting on page 49, available at www.usbjd.org/rd/?BJD09.

Plans for the continuation of the Decade beyond 2010 (2011 in the U.S.) were presented and discussed at the conference. At its December meeting, the USBJD Board unanimously agreed the USBJD will continue beyond 2011.

Participants said they found the conference an enriching experience and that the opportunity to learn from the expert presenters and other supporters of the Decade was unparalleled.

An in-depth report on the conference and sessions has been published in the Winter/Spring 2010 edition of the USBJD Newsletter (www.usbjd.org), and video-recordings of many sessions can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/bjdvideos>.

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