



Original Article/Research

An information marketing campaign promotes physician donation to a radiology political action committee

Campaign Promotes Donation to Radiology PAC

Michael J. Drabkin^{a,b,*}, Joshua Fogel^c, Oleksandra Kutsenko^d, Salman Shah^b, Alexander Misono^e

^a Department of Radiology, Catholic Health Services of Long Island, Long Island, NY, USA

^b Department of Radiology, Nassau University Medical Center, East Meadow, NY, USA

^c Department of Business Management, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY, USA

^d Department of Radiology, Upstate Medical University, Syracuse, NY, USA

^e Newport Harbor Radiology Associates, Irvine, CA, USA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To evaluate the impact of an informational marketing campaign on radiology political action committee (PAC) donations.

Methods: The Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR) Resident and Fellow Section (RFS) Advocacy Committee implemented an informational marketing campaign beginning with an email survey in January 2017. Society of Interventional Radiology Political Action Committee (SIRPAC) donors (n = 564) and donations were compared prior to and after the marketing campaign.

Results: Comparisons from 2015–2016 (n = 353, 62.6%) to 2017–2018 (n = 432, 76.6%) showed a statistically significant increase (p < 0.001) in donors. Comparisons from 2015–2016 (M=\$124.73, SD = 202.18) to 2017–2018 (M=\$229.96, SD = 404.72) showed a statistically significant mean increase (p < 0.001) in donations.

Discussion: Raising awareness of SIRPAC through a targeted informational marketing initiative had a positive impact on PAC donations. Although a causal relationship cannot be definitively determined, we believe that implementation of similar interventions can be useful in order to help raise funds for other medical specialty PACs.

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Public interest summary

Political factors can impact patient care in the United States. Political Action Committees (PACs) representing the interests of medical professional societies are dwarfed by the PACs of competing interests such as insurance companies and health maintenance organizations (HMOs). The Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR) Resident and Fellow Section (RFS) Advocacy Committee implemented an informational marketing campaign in January 2017. This study evaluates the impact of that informational marketing campaign on radiology political action committee (PAC) donations. Society of Interventional Radiology Political Action Committee (SIRPAC) donors (n = 564) and donations were compared prior

to and after the marketing campaign. We found a statistically significant increase in both the number of donors and the average donation amount. We believe that similar interventions can be useful in order to help raise funds for other medical PACs. This is important in order for physicians to maintain a role in forming health policy.

Introduction

Advocacy in radiology

Political factors can impact patient care in the United States. Medical professional societies and the interests of their members are often represented on the federal level by political action committees (PACs) [1]. These PACs provide support to politicians and policymakers through monetary donations directed towards candidates for public office. PACs representing the interests of med-

* Corresponding author at: 50 NY-25A, Smithtown, NY 11787
E-mail address: michaeljdrabkin@gmail.com (M.J. Drabkin).

ical professional societies are dwarfed by the PACs of competing interests such as insurance companies and health maintenance organizations (HMOs). For example, insurance companies and HMOs spent almost \$250 million on lobbying in 2017 [2,3]. However, health professional organizations combined spent approximately one third of that amount over the same time period, with the particular medical discipline of Radiology organizations only spending about 1% of that amount [4]. This tremendous spending power of insurance companies and HMOs has allowed them to influence legislation such as the Affordable Care Act [5]. This sort of disparity is common in lobbying; in 2015 a prominent lobbying scholar reported that “for every dollar spent on lobbying by labor unions and public-interest groups together, large corporations and their associations now spend \$34 [6].” The function of lobbying is to help shape government action through communication and dissemination of information [6].

Support of Radiology groups and their associated political action committees (PACs) is one way that radiologists can help to ensure that reimbursements and other interests remain commensurate with the great amount of time, resources, and capital invested in the practice of medicine [7,8]. It is in the best interests of medical specialties to have PACs in order to ensure that their physicians’ voices are heard when new federal policies are being created in the United States [9,10].

The Society of Interventional Radiology Political Action Committee (SIRPAC) represents the interests of interventional radiology (IR) on Capitol Hill, educating members of Congress about the merits of IR as well as lobbying on behalf of their interests. In the current environment, it is critical that policymakers understand the role of IR in healthcare and the specific issues impacting its future. Notable past SIRPAC victories include helping to avoid a possible 41% cut to reimbursement as part of the 2007 CHAMP Act which had its language changed to exclude cuts to image-guided procedures [11].

Marketing, donor behavior and fundraising

Many studies report that the vast majority of donations are prompted [12–14]. Donors are also more likely to donate greater amounts when they are prompted [15]. Beyond prompting, providing information to donors has a positive impact on encouraging donations [16,17]. Several studies demonstrate an advantage in soliciting both a greater amount of donations and larger individual donations by providing donors with relevant information as well as by utilizing online modalities such as e-mail [18,19].

Radiology and PAC fundraising

In the Radiology literature, a previously published study surveyed the Society of Interventional Radiology (SIR) membership. The study found that key factors influencing SIRPAC donations included knowledge of the federal advocacy process, personal income level, and awareness that membership dues do not fund SIRPAC [20]. Another study regarding Radiology PAC donations examined potential interest in donating among Radiology residents and found that those with children, with educational debt, and without knowledge of Radiology PACs had less interest in contributing [21]. A third study found that federal political donations by radiologists increased by over 3-fold from 2003 to 2016; the vast majority of these donations was to RADPAC the political action committee of the American College of Radiology Association [22].

To our knowledge there are no publications examining the impact of marketing techniques on medical PAC donations from any medical discipline. This study evaluates the impact of an informational marketing campaign on donations to a Radiology medical

professional political action committee (PAC) by examining donation data from individual donors both prior to and following the informational marketing campaign. The primary hypothesis is that the marketing campaign would increase the number of donors. The secondary hypothesis is that the marketing campaign would increase the mean dollar amount of donations.

Methods

Participants and setting

In January 2017 we began a marketing campaign with the goal of raising awareness of SIRPAC and increasing SIRPAC donations. The target audience of this marketing campaign was the entire SIR membership, which was 4,474 at the time that the marketing campaign was initiated.

Donation data were provided by SIRPAC. There were 564 attending Radiology physicians that donated in at least one of the four years of 2015 through 2018 that were included in our analysis. Donors who were not attending Radiology physicians were excluded and this consisted of medical students (n = 11), residents (n = 59), fellows (n = 11), associate members (n = 2), retired members (n = 6), or non-members (n = 13). Ethical approval was obtained from the hospital Institutional Review Board.

Marketing campaign intervention

Members of the SIR Resident and Fellow (RFS) Advocacy Committee had monthly meetings to discuss issues pertaining to radiology political advocacy. The committee set out to raise awareness of SIRPAC and increase SIRPAC donations through a series of projects and initiatives. The first part of the marketing campaign began on January 25, 2017 when the SIR RFS Advocacy Committee distributed an email survey to the SIR membership in order to characterize factors associated with SIRPAC donation as well as to educate survey takers about political advocacy [20]. The survey also contained content educating physicians about the federal advocacy process, past achievements of SIRPAC, and the fact that society membership dues do not fund SIRPAC [20]. The second part of the marketing campaign consisted of presenting the survey results at the Society of Interventional Radiology 43rd Annual Scientific Meeting on March 20, 2018 [23]. The third part of the marketing campaign was publishing the data in a peer reviewed journal targeting radiologists. This content was published online first on September 1, 2018 in the peer reviewed journal of Current Problems in Diagnostic Radiology [19].

Variables

Information on gender (male, female, or not indicated) was obtained. Dollar amounts (US\$) for each year were obtained. Those with multiple donations each year were combined into one total dollar amount for each year. Also, donations were analyzed as no/yes

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to describe the continuous variables. Percentage and frequency were used to describe the categorical variables. As the continuous donation dollar amount data had skewed distributions, the Wilcoxon-signed-rank test compared the paired data. The categorical donation data were analyzed with the McNemar test. Data from 2015 through 2017 were converted into 2018 inflation adjusted values by adding the Consumer Price Index inflation rates for each year [24]. All p-values were two-tailed. IBM SPSS Statistics Version 25 was used for all analyses [25].

Table 1
SIRPAC Donation Comparisons Before and After the Marketing Campaign.

Variable	Mean (SD)	Frequency (Percentage)	p-value
Donation	–		<0.001
2015-2016 (yes)		353 (62.6)	
2017-2018 (yes)		432 (76.6)	
Donation	–		<0.001
2016 (yes)		217 (38.5)	
2017 (yes)		217 (38.5)	
Dollar Amount		–	<0.001
2015-2016 (US\$)	124.73 (202.18)		
2017-2018 (US\$)	229.96 (404.72)		
Dollar Amount		–	<0.001
2016 (US\$)	51.19 (114.89)		
2017 (US\$)	134.45 (292.82)		

Note: SD=standard deviation

Results

The sample gender was 92.7% male (n = 523), 6.7% female (n = 38), and 0.5% not indicated (n = 3). Table 1 shows comparisons for donations before and after the intervention. Comparisons from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018 showed a statistically significant increase (p < 0.001) in donors after the intervention by 14.0% with 79 more donors. Comparisons from 2016 to 2017 showed a statistically significant increase (p < 0.001) in donors after the intervention by 20.0% with 113 more donors. Comparisons from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018 showed a statistically significant mean increase (p < 0.001) in donations after the intervention by \$105.23. Comparisons from 2016 to 2017 showed a statistically significant mean increase (p < 0.001) in donations after the intervention by \$83.26. There were 211 people who did not donate during 2015-2016 who donated during 2017-2018. Of these 211 people, there were 78 prior donors who had donated at least once from 2008 through 2014, did not donate in 2015-2016, and after the intervention donated in 2017-2018.

Comparisons from 2015-2016 (M = US\$132.17, SD = 214.26) to 2017-2018 (M = US\$236.08, SD = 416.63) using 2018 inflation adjusted values showed a statistically significant mean in-

crease (p < 0.001) in donations after the intervention by \$103.91. Comparisons from 2016 (M = US\$54.21, SD = 121.67) to 2017 (M = US\$140.57, SD = 306.14) using 2018 inflation adjusted values showed a statistically significant mean increase (p < 0.001) in donations after the intervention by \$86.36.4.

Discussion

Our informational marketing campaign comprised of e-mail contact, conference presentation, and journal publication had a statistically significant positive impact on increased PAC donations. Consistent with our primary hypothesis, the marketing campaign increased the number of donors. Consistent with our secondary hypothesis, the marketing campaign increased the mean dollar amount of donations.

The lack of female representation in our sample (which was 92.7% male) is explained by the gender breakdown within the specialty of Interventional Radiology. According to the AAMC 2017 Physician Specialty Data Report, 90.5% of Interventional Radiologists were male [26].

The 2017-2018 SIR election cycle, which took place during our marketing campaign period, saw the greatest SIRPAC donation total dollar amounts and number of donors (Fig. 1). Our marketing campaign may have contributed to this increased amount. We suggest increased visibility of SIRPAC and awareness of SIRPAC among radiologists as the main reason for this increased donation.

The 2017-2018 election cycle was also the first ever in which SIRPAC outraised SVSPAC with \$137,400 as compared to \$123,030. The SIR and the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) are similar in terms of number of members; in 2017 there were 3,415 active Interventional Radiologists and 3,686 active Vascular Surgeons. For the 2015-2016 election cycle prior to our marketing campaign SIRPAC raised only \$78,740 whereas SVSPAC raised \$185,722 [27,28].

Previous research suggests that knowledge and awareness influence donations [16-19]. Our current study demonstrates this with a sharp uptick in donations following our informational marketing campaign that increased awareness and knowledge among our pool of donors and potential donors.

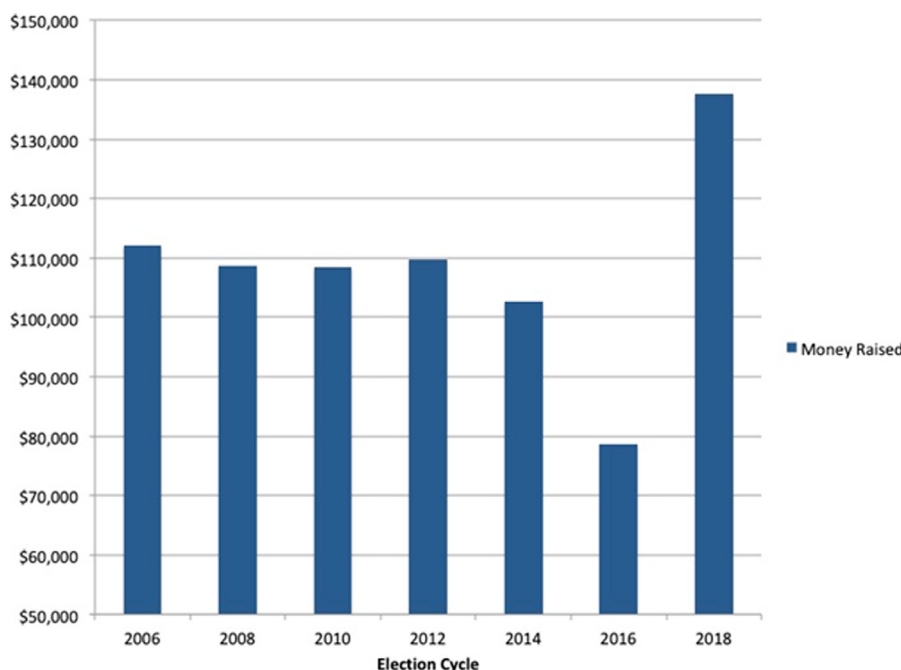


Fig. 1. SIRPAC Donations by Election Cycle (2006-2018)

Furthermore, radiologists' knowledge of the federal advocacy process, personal income, and awareness that membership dues and foundation funds do not fund SIRPAC were identified as key factors influencing donations [20]. Radiology PAC fundraising may benefit from raising awareness of the federal advocacy process, as well as from targeted fundraising strategies aimed at higher income earners. We believe that similar marketing campaigns can be useful for other medical specialties to implement in order to help raise the lobbying power of medical professionals as a whole. Perhaps by expanding advocacy efforts across all of medicine, this could help bridge the gap in lobbying power between PACs representing medical professional societies and those of insurance companies and HMOs.

This study has several limitations. First, the congressional run of Steve Ferrara, an Interventional Radiologist, may have impacted SIRPAC donations during the 2017–2018 election cycle [29]. However, it is unknown whether Dr. Ferrara's run contributed to increased donations by way of increased political awareness of SIR members or whether direct donations to Dr. Ferrara may have taken away from funds that would have otherwise been donated to SIRPAC. Second, it is possible that physicians retired during the years of 2016–2018 and as they were no longer members of SIR, they did not receive exposure to our intervention and thus did not donate. Third, it is possible that there were physicians who were resident or fellow physicians during the years of 2015–2016 that did not donate and then became attending physicians during the years of 2017–2018 and as they had more disposable income donated to SIRPAC. Fourth, as this was not a controlled trial, there may be other factors that we did not measure that may impact the donation pattern. Future research should consider randomized controlled trials to determine donation patterns.

Conclusions

Our informational marketing campaign to raise awareness of PACs had a positive impact on PAC donations for Radiology. We believe that similar informational marketing campaigns can be useful for other medical specialties to implement in order to help raise the lobbying power of medical professionals as a whole and to ensure that medical professionals remain an important voice in medical policy making.

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Data may be made available upon request.

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