



REPORT

‘Homeopathy on the Hill’ Event Reaches Far and Wide

More Than 180 Congressional Offices Visited

...And a Piece of Draft Legislation

WASHINGTON – No one had ever seen this many homeopathy advocates on Capitol Hill before. For the first time ever the homeopathy community descended on Washington, DC in large numbers to talk in person with members of Congress and their staffs. In total more than 150 volunteers visited Congressional offices on April 9, the day that volunteers from across the country converged on Washington.

“It was historic in the sense that the homeopathy community has never mounted a concerted effort on this scale to influence federal policy,” according to Paola Brown, president of Americans for Homeopathy Choice (AFHC) which organized the event dubbed Homeopathy of the Hill with the help of scores of volunteers.

“We were pleased that our discussions with Congressional staff prior to the event led to a piece of draft legislation in the House which if passed would ensure that the full range of homeopathic medicines remain available and which would maintain safeguards that protect the quality and purity of those medicines,” she added.

This development allowed the volunteers not only to educate staff and members of Congress about homeopathy, but also to ask members of the House—where the bill is originating—to become co-sponsors.

Of the 184 Congressional appointments that volunteers and AFHC leadership scheduled, some 107 were in House offices and 77 were in Senate offices. This included all-important meetings that Brown and volunteer Congressional liaison Laura Held conducted with health committee staff members from both chambers. Held worked previously for the U.S. Federal Reserve Board in Washington and “understands the city and its political culture in ways that proved invaluable,” Brown said.

“We are also indebted to the many volunteers such as Allison Stusse, Audrey Van Auken, Diana Johnson, Kaylee Braz, and Trisha Hall, who among others worked tirelessly in planning and managing the logistics to make the event a success,” Brown said. “And, a very special thank-you goes out to the many mothers, women, and other supporters who made the sacrifice of time and money to attend the event and raise their voices.”

Almost three months prior to the event, elegant printed invitations to an April 9 Congressional briefing on homeopathy and the premiere of the documentary film, “Magic Pills: Homeopathy, Promise or Placebo?” had been delivered to all 535 Congressional offices, the offices of delegates representing U.S. territories, and key staffers for important committees.

“We did a number of email follow-ups with Congressional staff members,” said Held, who volunteered considerable time to the organizing effort. In addition, scores of volunteers who wanted to help, but who were unable to come to Washington, scheduled telephone appointments with Congressional staff prior to the event. As part of their talking points, those volunteers reminded staff members about the briefing and film on April 9.

But, Brown believes that an unexpected and seemingly negative development raised the profile of homeopathy so much in Congress several days before the Homeopathy on the Hill event that it resulted in a standing-room-only crowd during the Congressional briefing on April 9.

On April 1 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a news release outlining the content of several warning letters sent to homeopathic pharmacies. Every health policy advisor in Congress received a copy of this release. After that, the halls of Congress were all abuzz about homeopathy. “Every staff member and every member of Congress with whom we had appointments prior to the Homeopathy on the Hill event wanted to know what we thought about the FDA’s action,” Brown explained.

The AFHC leadership team swung into action issuing a [statement](#) in response two days later. In the statement AFHC contended that the warning letters show that the current system is working just as it should: The FDA discovered manufacturing problems in routine inspections and asked that those problems be corrected. None of the FDA’s warning letters had anything to do with properly formulated homeopathic medicines. AFHC’s contention that the FDA should leave the current homeopathy regulatory system alone was, in AFHC’s view, vindicated by the FDA’s action.

The AFHC statement was then incorporated into the information packets delivered by volunteers who met with staff and members of Congress on April 9. Those packets were also distributed to every Congressional office that did not receive a visit from either a volunteer or the leadership team of AFHC. All 535 members of Congress now have access to AFHC’s views on homeopathy and information on the draft legislation designed to protect it.

To prepare volunteers for their appointments, whether by telephone or in person, AFHC created handbooks giving step-by-step instructions about how to arrange appointments and what to say during those appointments. Additional training was offered online for those calling from home and also during a pre-event training dinner for those who came

to Washington. At the training dinner seasoned political professionals answered volunteers' questions and offered pointers on how to make their meetings successful.

Most of the Congressional staff members who met with volunteers and AFHC leadership were health policy advisors. What surprised everyone was that despite the fact that homeopathy is a federally recognized form of medicine mentioned in the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and regulated by the FDA, most staffers knew little or nothing about homeopathy, Brown said. This turned out to be an advantage as the AFHC briefing mentioned above, the volunteer meetings and the information packet now form the basis for these staffers' understanding of homeopathy.

The Homeopathy on the Hill event finished with the Washington, DC metro premiere of the documentary film "Magic Pills," produced by Toronto-based homeopath, Ananda More. In the film More takes viewers on a globetrotting tour to India, Switzerland, Africa and other places to examine the use and effectiveness of homeopathy.

A mix of volunteers and Congressional staff dressed in gowns and black tie attended the event which included a reception and a question-and-answer session with filmmaker More.

"We think the Homeopathy on the Hill event worked well for us and hope to do it again," Brown said. "But first we have to focus on the draft legislation which we believe can provide a sound regulatory footing for homeopathy in the long term."