



SPRING Seminar Series

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Health Advocacy by States Attorneys General

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- Attorneys General office as a public health advocacy tool
- Advocates need face to face time - even though we have made huge strides with technology, in order to affect change you need to knock on doors and get to know people
 - e.g. Kelly drove through snowstorm to meet with VT legislators on the topic of obesity
 - VT AG, idea is to convene people across the state – legislators, state agencies, school districts, YMCA – to make progress on this issue
- Government advocacy - we are not going to make progress by filing a lawsuit on this issue
 - lawsuits are one tool, but its not the main solution, its not going to create sufficient change, like getting bad food out of schools
- Legislators – push and pull, e.g. vote for this and we'll expand Amtrak, so it's very difficult to create change because there are so many opposing forces and many people to deal with
- AG position is unique because you have a culture of action
 - Yet, still faces challenges: On the example of soda tax – the VT AG will face huge criticism from industry. Industry will launch campaigns to undermine AG obesity efforts, and his career
- What does the AG do? What can they do?

Open Discussion

- What lessons can we learn from the tobacco wars?
 - Tobacco is clear – the product kills you

- Food is more complicated, because the product doesn't kill you and we need food to live
- The federal government cares about the obesity issue, so at least the state's have that to rely on
- There is huge potential for advocacy, e.g. if everyone who went to a farmer's market sent an email/letter to their AG we would have a much bigger "grassroots" movement
- AGs action on Smart Choices
 - This is a clear, low hanging fruit issue
 - This case was an easy win
 - The federal government hadn't done anything as of labor day 2009
 - The defense lawyers knew that there were emails between CEOs/accountants/marketing that would blow them out of the water
 - What is the next low hanging fruit issue?
 - The industry is smart, and this issue wont be resolved by a lawsuit
- AG on soda tax
 - AG could stand beside commissioner of health at a press conference on this issue – clout
- What else can public health and advocacy people do to provide support for the soda tax issue, or on any hard issue the AG takes a stand on?
 - Go there in person / see people face to face
 - Example of the parade – meet all the community members, get exposure, etc.
- AG / politicians – being nice is a skill set
 - AG activism doesn't have to on your side
 - AG cant be activists in a lot of ways, you don't want to lead too quick because you will end up with a lawsuit
- When you talk to local state legislator – don't forget to talk to the AG
 - Advocacy groups are terrible at dealing with AG