Building Political Capital: Engaging Families in Child Health Policy

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As we approach another presidential election, pediatricians across the country will once again be called upon to lend their voice and expertise to child health policy discussions. It is therefore both timely and relevant to consider the variety of roles that pediatricians can play in supporting and promoting public policies that benefit child health. Pediatricians have historically used their knowledge and experience to advocate for children and families in a number of forums, including authoring opinion pieces and editorials, participating in interviews with the media, and meeting with policymakers. While these forms of advocacy are important, they lack a key characteristic: enhancing the agency of our patients and families. Although pediatricians often convey anecdotes to channel families' experiences and perspectives in these forums, this type of advocacy does little to strengthen the voices and political capital of the families and communities we serve. To better ensure that future policy-making is informed by what is best for children's health and welfare, should we consider it our duty to encourage families to engage in civic discourse and advocacy themselves?

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