



Just what is Advocacy?

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You have heard that advocacy is a major benefit of MSRT member but what does that really mean?

Definition: (ad·vo·ca·cy) noun; the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal : "Advocacy" *Google.com, July 2016*

Synonyms: support for, backing of, promotion of, championing of; argument for, push for; informal boosterism of, encouragement, backing, sponsorship, promotion, activism, opposition

I think a simpler way to describe it is standing up for something you believe in or care about. Any one can do it. I'll bet you do it every day, for yourself, for your children or for a specific cause in your community. It just means that you identify something you care about, a desire, a need or a goal and you stand up for yourself, and do everything that you can to accomplish it.

In 1931 a small group of individuals with common interests and goals joined together to establish the Massachusetts Society of Radiologic Technologists. Since that day, The MSRT has been advocating on behalf of all technologists and our profession. Our common goal is described within the mission statement "advancement of radiologic technology by promoting high ethical standards, improving the quality of patient care, maintaining the standards of education, and providing quality continuing professional development opportunities for all medical imaging and therapy professionals".

Massachusetts has been recognized as a leader in this country since the advocacy efforts undertaken over a fifteen year time period resulted in the establishment of strong radiologic technologist licensing regulations in 1989. It was not an easy achievement, but persistence paid off and we have a small group of dedicated technologists and the MSRT to thank for it. But nothing stays the same for long. Change is inevitable and necessary, healthcare has certainly changed a lot since 1989. Today, we are faced with the need for updated regulations that reflect the technology we utilize and current practice in medical imaging and radiation therapy. We are also continually challenged with issues related to encroachment of other individuals on our scope of practice.

I have been an MSRT member since my student days and have contributed by serving on the MSRT board in many capacities. It is only in the past few years though, that I have actively participated in the MSRT advocacy efforts. I have learned a great deal by doing so. I have been influenced by those who led the way before me that I have had the privilege to know and played a major role in the enactment of Massachusetts RT licensing, David Sack, Jim Lampka, and Judy Burnett to name just a few. I am now serving as Co-Chair of the MSRT Governance Committee. I share this role with David LeClair who has been leading the MSRT advocacy efforts for many years. We are fortunate to be joined in these advocacy efforts by a great group of dedicated Radiologic Technologists.

You see, this is not a singular task. It is all hands on deck. There is no single job that we do that you could describe as difficult, but the work is relentless. We network, yes there's that word again. We try to get to know as many people as we can within our own profession, in important offices of our state government offices like Department of Public Health (DPH) and our own legislators. We communicate with them via email and telephone regularly and monitor key websites for updates on the status of pending legislation. We write letters and occasionally visit legislators or attend and present testimony at legislative hearings. We educate others on topics related to our profession. We communicate with the MSRT members.

There is a lot of red tape involved in our state government and there is no predictable time frame for when things will occur. In some instances the process stalls and accomplishing a specific task seems to take forever. The updated licensing regulations are a good example of that. We have been working on that, along with the RCP for several years and we are still waiting! At other times, things happen so quickly we hardly have time to react. These are the stressful times and typically when we are sending out to you a "call to action". One of the keys to a good grassroots advocacy program is the ability to rally the troops in these instances. Letter writing and phone call campaigns work because there really is strength in numbers. It's easy, it's quick and it is important to do.

I do this because I care. I care about our patients, about you, my friends and colleagues, myself and my job and my students who are the future of this profession. The medical imaging profession has been very good to me for many years and this is a small way that I can give back.

Sadly, MSRT membership has seen a steady decline in recent years. There are more than 7000 licensed radiologic technologists in Massachusetts but less than 10% of them are MSRT members. Many more maintain membership in the ASRT, I suspect because they have the resources to provide you with easy access to continuing education credits. But professional society membership is about so much more than that. The MSRT needs you and your support. If we are going to be successful in our efforts to protect our profession we need to increase our membership rolls.

I believe that you care too. You need to advocate for yourself. I challenge each of you to talk to your colleagues and recruit at least one new MSRT member each month during the current membership year. I also challenge you to get involved. Write a letter, make a phone call, come to a meeting and join a committee or run for office. Each of you needs to decide how much you are willing or able to do, but if you care about your job and our profession you need to do something.