



Perspective/Opinion

Reflections in Voting: Planning Ahead to Get Yourself and Others to the Polls

By Amy Domeyer-Klenske, MD – Wisconsin ACOG Legislative Chair

Dr. Domeyer-Klenske, an obstetrician and gynecologist, reflects upon the importance of planning ahead where possible and getting creative when getting yourself and others to the polls ...

I am a native Iowan and clearly remember my first Iowa caucus. My family was never particularly active in politics, and I remember learning from my college roommate, a political science major, the differences between a Democrat and Republican. My first elections came at a formative time in my life as I began to understand voting as a civic responsibility. Despite living their entire lives in the state, I doubt either of my parents had ever previously attended the caucuses. In 2008, my mother succumbed to my badgering and drove with me in the frigid Iowa winter to the Tri-State Blind Society where collections of voters would join with their neighbors to discuss candidates and pledge allegiance to their favorite. There was a thrill in convincing voters of non-viable candidates (those who did not have enough voters to claim any share of electors) to support your candidate. It is an odd scene, requires you to be on-site for the duration of the event and to publicly claim your party affiliation and favored politician. I remember my mom whispering to me as we walked into the building, “*you mean I must register as a Democrat? What will my friends say?*” This early moment in my voting life helped me to understand the importance of reaching out a hand and bringing others with you to participate in elections.

In 2012, I was a resident in Maine when the presidential election occurred. My husband was briefly in a home-brewing phase and smashed his hand through a thin panel of glass when putting away his brewing equipment on election day. He wrapped his hand in a dish towel and drove, not to the ER for stitches, but to pick me up from my labor and delivery shift so we could go vote. He continued to don his dish towel pressure dressing when we went to the polls, waiting for his obstetrician wife to irrigate his wounds until he after we voted.

These experiences taught me that sometimes even the most well-intentioned of us need an extra hand to help us get to the polls. In 2018, I was the faculty covering the inpatient gynecology service on election day. One of our junior residents who was still relatively new to the area had not yet gotten her materials together to register and did not have a plan to vote.

At the last minute, we were able to contact the clerk to determine what materials she needed to register that day. I took the resident pager and covered the service so she could both register and vote that day. There are many barriers to getting to a polling place on election day, but I did not want my inpatient service to be one of them.

Why are we focusing our *Transformational Times* on the topic of voting months ahead of an election? Certainly, enthusiasm for this topic will swell in the fall as televisions are flooded with ads and neighborhood lawns begin to don signage for preferred candidates. Getting ourselves, our trainees and our patients to the polls takes planning and election day may be too late. We can all find ways now to ensure those around us have the tools to help them register early and, if desired, request mail-in ballots to ensure their voices are heard. As healthcare providers, we are increasingly seeing legislation and health policy that directly impacts our patients and our practices.

Some simple advocacy tools we can each utilize should start now:

- talk with each other about healthcare policy priorities and the best candidates to advance legislation that would serve the health needs of our patients;
- educate ourselves on important dates/deadlines for elections;
- and help each other find ways to register and vote before election day.

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