



EXECUTIVE DECISIONS IN DERMATOLOGY

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016

You're Invited

*Book today to Washington, D.C. for ADAM's 24th Annual Meeting
March 2 - 4, 2016 at Washington Marriott Georgetown*

[Click here for the detailed program and registration information](#)



Association of Dermatology
Administrators & Managers

EXECUTIVE DECISIONS IN DERMATOLOGY

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2016

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Executive Decisions in Dermatology is a bimonthly publication of the **Association of Dermatology Administrators & Managers (ADAM)**. ADAM is the only national organization dedicated to dermatology administrative professionals. ADAM offers its members exclusive access to educational opportunities and resources needed to help their practices grow. Our 650 members (and growing daily!) include administrators, practice managers, attorneys, accountants and physicians in private, group and academic practice.

To join ADAM or for more information, please visit our Website at ada-m.org, call 866.480.3573, email ADAMinfo@shcare.net, fax 800.671.3763 or write Association of Dermatology Administrators & Managers, 1120 G Street, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20005.



Association of Dermatology
Administrators & Managers



Social Media for Healthcare

Amplifying Paid and Earned Media Messages in the Digital Age

By Michelle Abdow

The advent of digital media, including real-time communications tools like Twitter and Facebook, has significantly altered marketing initiatives. Because social media is a relatively new channel of communication and there are so many different options, it can be difficult to understand which platforms make sense for a health care practice and how to use them most effectively. This third installment of a three-part marketing series will focus on how social media is a great supplement to traditional marketing plans for health care and how they can be integrated with current initiatives for the best return on investment.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS A SUPPLEMENT, NOT A REPLACEMENT, FOR TRADITIONAL MARKETING

Many social media platforms are free to use, so it's a common mistake to think that replacing other paid-for marketing initiatives with social media will increase ROI. The bottom line is that while many of the platforms are free to use, the human resources and best practices to support social media take time and cost money. Let's explore those best practices and initiatives that maximize the ROI of social media initiatives.

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT

It takes time to build out the infrastructure of a Facebook page or Twitter account, and it takes time to research content to post and reply to comments from the public. Successful social media campaigns have a budget to support the staff behind the screen including the development of a strategy and execution of the plan. Unsuccessful social media campaigns often result from good intentions, but a lack of expertise, forward planning for regular posts and untimely replies to public comments. A great example of this is that Facebook now rates business pages by the promptness of replies. If a business does not have the staff or hours allocated to monitoring social media accounts, questions

go unanswered and negative comments from the public can damage a brand. A great solution to avoid this mistake is to build out a social media calendar with proactive posts for the month (or year if you have the time) that ensures regular sharing of relevant content. When the social media or marketing manager logs in to post comments, it's a great time to check for questions or comments from the public.

An important part of social media management is evaluating what is working for the brand and what is not working. Business accounts on social media often come with an analytics dashboard (or have them available for a fee). Analyzing which posts or content people are sharing with their followers or are driving the most conversions (clicks to your company website, filling out a form requesting more information, etc.) will help a business use social media more effectively over time. Again, it takes time to use analytics appropriately and learn what key metrics matter most for your business. This step is most often missed by businesses that trust an intern or inexperienced social media marketing associate to manage social media for business. Do not be fooled by your social media savvy niece or wet-behind-the-ears college grad that spent more time on Pinterest than going to class... social media for business

“Do not be fooled by your social media savvy niece or wet-behind-the-ears college grad that spent more time on Pinterest than going to class... social media for business requires a completely different skillset and uses different tools.”



requires a completely different skillset and uses different tools. You have a business plan and analyze it, and social media should be a part of it.

ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS AND ANALYTICS

Another reason why social media is not truly free for business is that enterprise solutions for businesses are paid-for services. LinkedIn, for example, has a premium offering that syncs to client relationship management (CRM) software to track leads. A perfect example of enterprise social media solutions for health care would be public service announcement (PSA)

campaigns on Facebook to create awareness about a new product, service or procedure. How can a PSA campaign be done effectively? With social media advertising options – an enterprise solution.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

A really great PSA campaign for a new offering needs to be seen to be effective. On Facebook, only those that “like” your business page will see your posts and updates. While it is free to post content on Facebook, increasing your likes can be difficult without advertising posts. Using Facebook’s advertising features to promote content drives more people to like

the business page and ensures that they will be seeing content published later. It’s an instant win for the current campaign and increases the audience for future announcements. Advertising options to promote content are available on most social media platforms.

Now that it’s established that social media management takes time and typically costs money to be most successful, understanding what platforms to allocate that budget toward is equally important....which begs the question, **what social media platforms are best for health care marketing?**

What social media platforms are best for health care marketing?





Blogs and Other Direct Communications

The health care industry is always rapidly changing, which requires constant patient education. A great way to provide information to patients is to write about what is new on a company blog. Like Facebook, increasing followers of the blog and creating awareness about the patient resource is important. Blogging tips:

- › Wordpress is user-friendly blogging platform with excellent customer service
- › Constant Contact and Mail Chimp are two of the best blast email services around, and do better than other services which can often get caught in email spam filters
- › The blog should be integrated into your website
- › Consider collecting email addresses from patients when they fill out forms prior to an appointment, and send out a digital newsletter that repurposes blog content
- › Post blogs often – adding regular, relevant and new content helps improve search engine optimization (SEO – which is a marketing term used to describe how well a website is found through search, like Google, Bing or Yahoo!)



Facebook

Facebook has one of the largest social media adoption rates, which means that more people can see and engage with content shared on this social media platform. What was once created by and intended for college students has now morphed into one of the most widely used social media platforms in the world. Additionally, Facebook has advanced analytics to help a business strategize and has powerful advertising solutions to help build an audience. Facebook post tips:

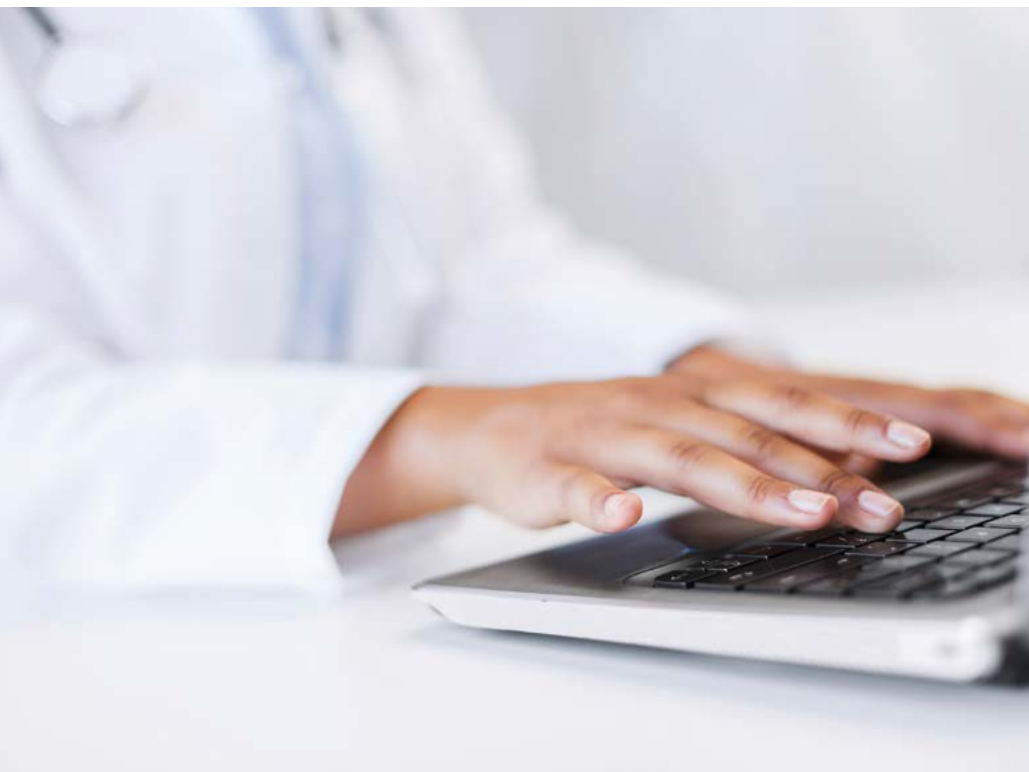
- › Include visuals like graphics and videos – they are the most shared and liked posts, which helps build the audience
- › Post articles that are related to the industry, including earned media articles featuring your company from public relations initiatives
- › Status updates that compliment advertising increases the reach of a message; for example, if your advertising is branding based, Facebook posts should be too, or if ads feature a special offer make sure your Facebook posts do the same



Instagram

While not all health care organizations have visual content to share, many dermatological procedures have powerful before and after photos. Take advantage of the highly visual nature of the dermatology industry to demonstrate the effectiveness of treatments and procedures offered by the industry. Additionally, Instagram adoption rates are much more popular with younger demographics including 20 and 30-somethings (Facebook demographics are rising in age) so including Instagram in a marketing strategy will increase the age demographics for a wider reach. Instagram tips:

- › Share before and after visuals
- › Use paid-for advertising opportunities to increase the reach of the post
- › Save visuals and create a printed flipbook for patients to browse when they are in the waiting room



“Taking time to evaluate what the business goals are and researching which platforms are most helpful is essential for success.”

There are many, many more social media platforms that can leverage a health care brand and its services. Taking time to evaluate what the business goals are and researching which platforms are most helpful is essential for success. Social media can be used as a vehicle to share paid, owned and earned media, and is a great supplement to traditional advertising and public relations initiatives for health care organizations. By sharing blog links, TV commercials, print advertisements and news links, medical professionals are able to educate the public about health issues while increasing the audience that sees their original content.

Regardless of what platform(s) is used, remember to keep messaging on point and offer value to the general audience. A good question to keep in mind is “what’s in it for me?” from the perspective of your target audience. With all that said, social media takes time and expertise – if analytics platforms have you confused and you’re not sure where to allocate a budget, bring in marketing professionals to help so you can focus on what you do best – creating the best possible experience and outcomes for your patients. To learn more about marketing, advertising, public relations or social media as it relates to your practice, visit MarketMentors.com. ■



Michelle Abdow
President

Market Mentors, LLC - a full-service marketing, advertising and public relations firm





2016

*March 2 - 4, 2016
in Washington, D.C.*

ANNUAL MEETING

Join us from **March 2nd to 4th, 2016** in **Washington, D.C.** for **ADAM's 24th Annual Meeting** – the one time a year where dermatology practice managers and administrators across the nation will gather in one area for exchanges in best practices, education and networking opportunities. This year, we have a strong program with focuses on:

- › **Compliance/Regulatory**
- › **Patient Centered Care**
- › **Human Resources**
- › **Marketing and Social Media**
- › **Practice Management**
- › **Revenue**

All sessions will provide critical information to ensure that your day-to-day practice management life runs seamlessly. We are thrilled with how the program turned out and can not wait to share these three days of professional development and personal connections with all of you.

*Keep scrolling to see a small sampling
of what you can expect:*



Wednesday

MARCH 2ND, 2016

ICD-10: What We Learned in the Past Five Months

Peggy Eiden, CCS-P, CPC, CPCD, CPMA, Faith McNicholas, RHIT, CPC, CPCD, CPMA and Cynthia Stewart, CPC, of the American Academy of Dermatology will share the hottest ICD-10 coding challenges shared by physician practices since the big change – and how to overcome these challenges.

SESSION:

Wednesday, March 2nd, 2016 | 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Navigating the Physician Quality Reporting System

Scott Weinberg of the American Academy of Dermatology will give attendees a “how-to” on successfully reporting PQRS measures to increase quality and to avoid payment reductions in 2018. This will include how those using EHR can use the AAD’s DataDerm clinical data registry to report PQRS.

SESSION:

Wednesday, March 2nd, 2016 | 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Thursday

MARCH 3RD, 2016

Pre-Audit and Post-Audit Risk Mitigation

Join Frank Cohen of Doctors Management in this two-part session as he takes you step-by-step on ways to mitigate risk before and after an audit. The pre-risk portion will review risk metrics and the post-risk portion will analyze results and mitigate the financial impact of extrapolation.

SESSION:

Thursday, March 3rd, 2016 | 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Guerilla Medical Practice Marketing: Social Media 2016

Nancy Rose Senich, Nancy Rose & Associates will guide you through the complex and continuously growing cyber-world of social media. This session will teach you the key elements that medical practices need in order to optimize their social media efforts for maximum, positive visibility while generating bottom line results.

SESSION:

Thursday, March 3rd, 2016 | 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

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Friday
MARCH 4TH, 2016

Overcoming Legal and Regulatory Issues Related to Pediatric and Adult Teledermatology

Join Terry Lewis, JD, UPMC Legal Department in an overview of the primary legal and regulatory issues related to pediatric and adult dermatology. The session will cover areas in teledermatology related to individual state provider licensure issues, state and federal privacy issues and minimum standards for care among other legal considerations.

SESSION:

Friday, March 4th, 2016 | 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

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Improving Point of Service Collections

In this session, Karen Zupko, KarenZupko & Associates, will take attendees through a step-by-step program used by other practices to make improvements in face-to-face financial counseling and collections. The session will also cover scripts for tactfully writing and talking about money and the benefits of providing both medical and aesthetic patients with fee quotes.

SESSION:

Friday, March 4th, 2016 | 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.



**Arrived in
Washington, D.C.
and looking for
something to do?**

Check out pages 15 – 20 to see
Angela Short and Maren Thomas’
must-see D.C. spots.



SPECIAL THANKS AND ***APPRECIATION*** FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP AND HARD WORK

24th Annual Meeting Co-Chairs
Tony Davis and Jill Sheon

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Looking to get involved?

If you're looking for a place to get involved and get connected in ADAM, please consider joining the Education Committee. The Education Committee provides educational programming opportunities to the ADAM membership throughout the year. The Committee develops topic priorities and speaker/author ideas that best deliver the topic message. In addition, the Education Committee develops the webinar schedule and assists the Annual Meeting Program Co-Chairs as needed. The Education Committee is the liaison for information and resources from CMS, HHS, AAD, MGMA and AAPC and other relevant entities to the ADAM Board and membership and works to distill the information to dermatology and practice management, keeping the ADAM Board and membership up-to-date and aware of current dermatology issues and topics.

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To get involved with the Education Committee or any other ADAM committee, sign up at the registration desk at the Annual Meeting or email ADAMinfo@shcare.net.

ANNUAL MEETING

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Shannon Finley and **Denise Henry Morrissey**,
Capitol Counsel, LLC
"Politics and Policy - Spring Update"

Beth Ziesenis, Avenue Z
"A Day in the Life of a Nerdy Dermatology Practice Manager"

Tony Davis, Dermatology Specialists, PA
and **Curtis Mayse**, FACMPE, CPC,
CliftonLarsonAllen, LLP
"State of Dermatology"

ANNUAL MEETING

HIGHLIGHTS

- We welcome all of our presenters and guests from the American Academy of Dermatology. **Thank you** for your expertise, involvement and support of ADAM.
- Join us at a **Table Topic for lunch on Thursday, March 3rd** during the conference. Confirmed topics will be dependent on the majority vote by Annual Meeting attendees. Past topics have included Managed Care Contracting, Internal Marketing, Billing and other topics related to practice management.
- Be sure to **visit the Exhibitor Showcase all day Thursday, March 3rd** and the **Vendor Reception** that same evening! We sincerely appreciate their support with our Annual Meeting.
- This year, we've added an additional networking opportunity. The **Early Bird Reception** will take place the evening of **Tuesday, March 1st at 6 p.m.** for those of you who happen to already be in town.

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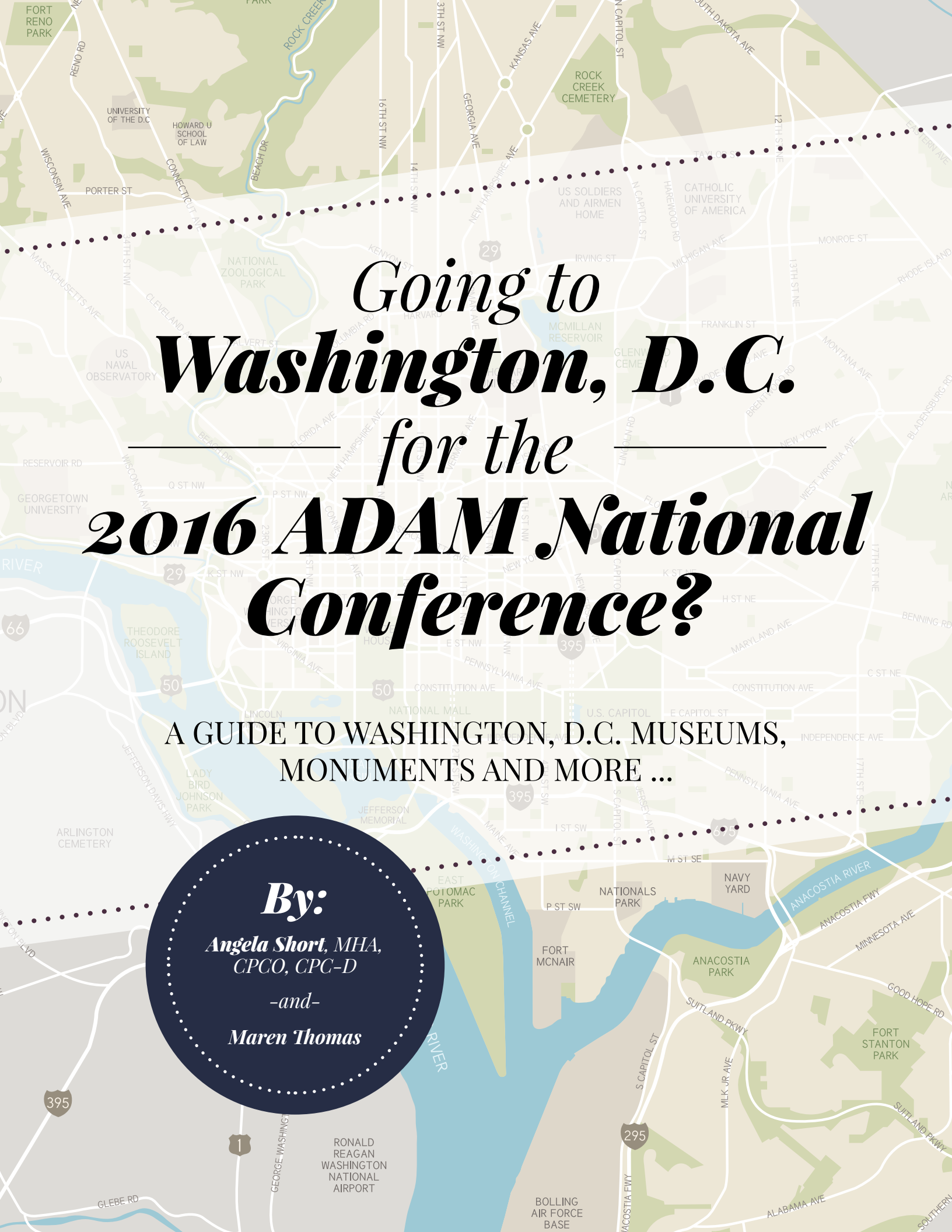
Another Great Place to Get Connected with ADAM ...

MENTORING COMMITTEE AND NETWORKING COMMITTEE

The Mentoring Committee works hard to welcome new ADAM members and guide them through their first Annual Meeting. The Networking Committee plans the networking dinners and other networking opportunities throughout the Annual Meeting.

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To get involved with either committee, sign up at the registration desk at the Annual Meeting or email ADAMInfo@shcare.net



Going to Washington, D.C. for the 2016 ADAM National Conference?

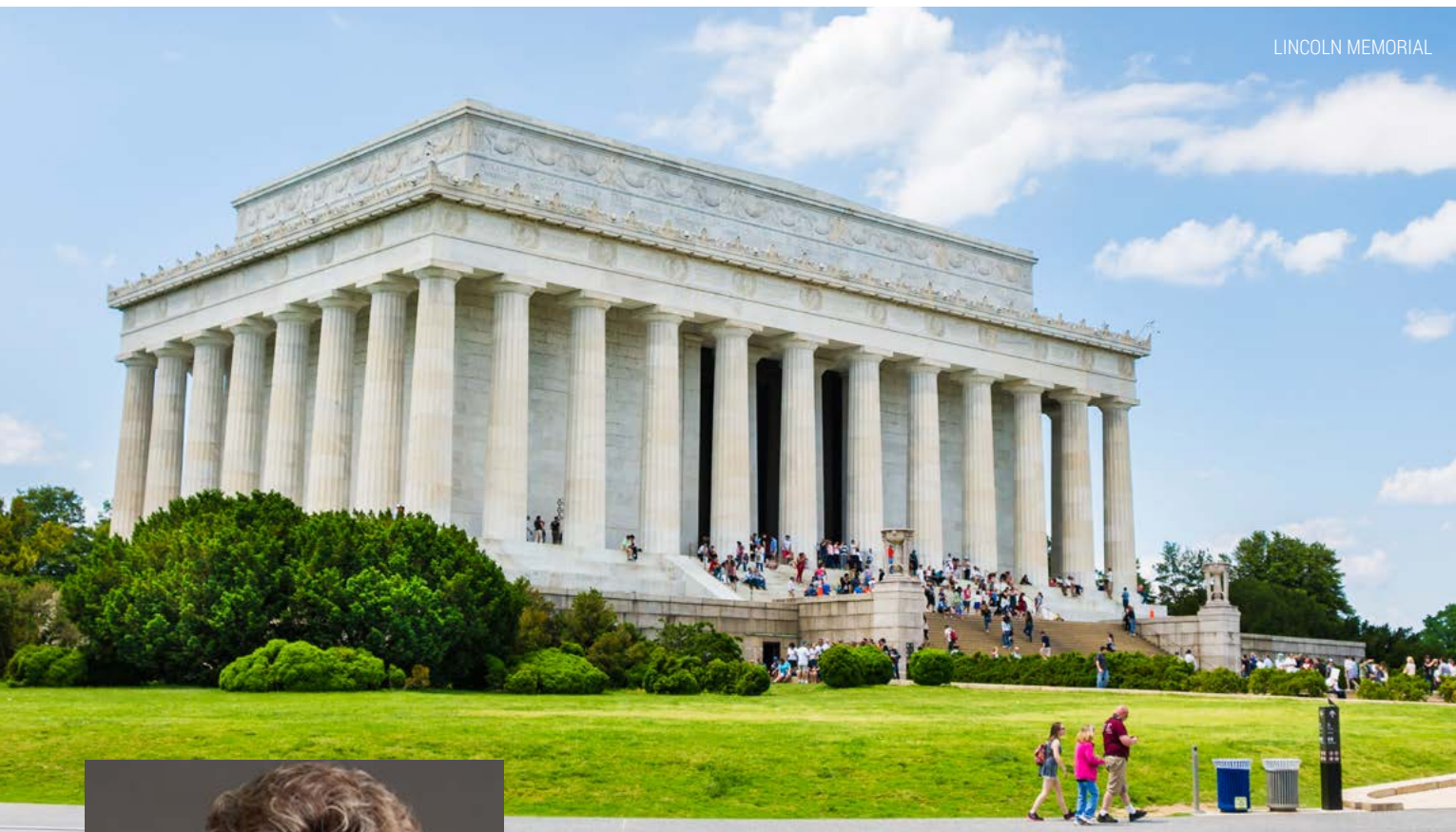
A GUIDE TO WASHINGTON, D.C. MUSEUMS,
MONUMENTS AND MORE ...

By:

*Angela Short, MHA,
CPCO, CPC-D*

-and-

Maren Thomas



Angela's Must See Museum & Monument Picks

*Angela Short, MHA, CPCO, CPC-D,
The Dermatology Group, PC, ADAM
Board Member and ADAM Education
Committee Chair*

As you arrive in the Nation's Capital, you may be asking yourself what there is to see or do beyond hearing political rhetoric. It does not matter if this is your first time to D.C. or your tenth, D.C. always has something new and exciting to offer that will likely cost you no more than the price of a bus or subway ticket. Highlighted below are a few of the top museums and for those that enjoy photography, a brief list of the top monuments that you will not want to miss.

So many museums, so little time...D.C. is packed with hundreds of museums and each offers a unique view of history or art. Most museums in D.C. are open from **10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. seven days a week**. To maximize your museum experience, you will probably want to arrive before or stay the weekend after the conference. Check rates for airfare as it is not uncommon for flights to be less over the weekend versus traveling on Friday after the conference concludes. This could be a great selling point to your employer. :) When visiting museums, leave your backpacks at the hotel as most area museums require pre-screening similar to an airport and a backpack with likely slow your entry into the museum. With so many museum options, I have listed on the following pages some that I consider "must sees".



National Archives Museum

– ADMISSION IS FREE.

Plan ahead as the lines to enter the museum can take an hour or longer especially during peak travel times (March is considered a peak travel time in D.C.). To avoid the line, reserve a timed ticket online for a nominal \$1.50 fee, use this link to book your reservation: <http://www.archives.gov/museum/visit/reserved-visits.html>. While at the National Archives Museum, you should plan at least 90 minutes to see the main attractions including: Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights.

Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum

– ADMISSION IS FREE.

Traveling to the museum is simple by public transportation. The closest Metro Station to the museum is L'Enfant Plaza. Please see a map of the metro at this website: <http://www.wmata.com/rail/maps/map.cfm>. Plan at least 90 minutes or more to tour this museum. Some of the highlights that you will not want to miss includes: 1903 Wright

Flyer, Spirit of St. Louis, Apollo 11 Command Module, countless aircraft, and a planetarium show. If you plan to catch the planetarium show, you will need to allocate additional time.

Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

– ADMISSION IS FREE.

Traveling to the museum is simple by public transportation. The closest Metro Station to the museum is Smithsonian Station. I have traveled to DC at least 20 times and I never miss this museum. However, I must say that I am sad to report that the fossil exhibit is closed through 2019. Plan at least 90 minutes or more to

tour this museum. For those that love bling...you will not want to miss the gems and minerals display where you will find the Hope Diamond and countless other jewels that will make any eyes twinkle. The Insect Zoo contains a live butterfly display that will immediately take you back to your childhood days. For more information about the National Museum of Natural History visit the official website at: <http://www.mnh.si.edu>.

Smithsonian National Zoo

– ADMISSION IS FREE.

For the kids or the kids at heart, the National Zoo is not to be missed. The zoo's hours are 10:00am to 4:30pm daily. Traveling to the museum is simple by public transportation. Woodley Park and Cleveland Park Metro stops will place you within walking distances to the zoo. While at the zoo, make sure you see the Giant Pandas. On January 16, 2016, in time for ADAM's arrival, visit the newest addition to the Giant Panda family; Bei Bei. The zoo also has over 1800 animals from more than 300 species, so there is something for everyone to see.



If your time only permits **one monument** then make sure you visit the **Lincoln Memorial**.

As an avid photographer, I frequent D.C. for the opportunity to photograph some of the world's most beautiful monuments. A nice benefit of the monuments is that you can visit 24/7 and they are as breathtaking (and possibly more so) at night as they are during the day. If your time only permits one monument, then make sure you visit the Lincoln Memorial. The monument pays tribute to the 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. Each column of the monument represents a state in the Union at the time of Lincoln's death. It is one of the most recognized monuments in the world and it's more impressive in person than in any photo. For more information about the Lincoln Memorial, visit the official website: <http://www.nps.gov/linc/index.htm>



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Thomas Jefferson Memorial

If you plan to travel to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, the local Metro Buses will minimize your walk. Bus routes 32, 34, and 36 make stops at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. See official website for additional information: <http://www.nps.gov/thje/index.htm>



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National War World II Memorial

This memorial is to honor the more than 400,000 that gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country. The Memorial is open 24/7 and Park Rangers are available to answer questions until 11:30pm. The Memorial is located at the east end of the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall.



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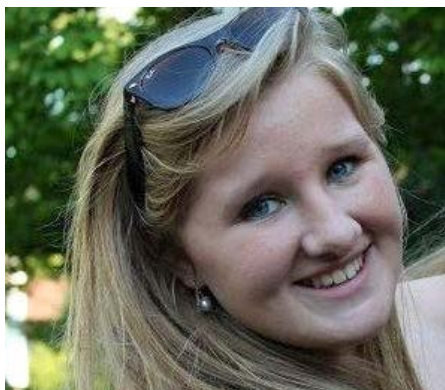
Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

Located on the National Mall, northeast of the Lincoln Memorial. The Wall contains more than 58,000 names of those that served. For additional information about the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, see the official website for additional information: <http://www.nps.gov/vive/index.htm>

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The list above is a small selection of what Washington, D.C. has to offer. Your hotel concierge can assist you with travel information as well as other top attractions in the area. Welcome to ADAM's 2016 Annual Meeting, we are glad to have you attend.

Keep reading to see Maren's top picks ...



Maren's Guide to Making the Most of D.C.

Maren Thomas, ADAM Intern

First, I would like to say Welcome to DC! It is easily one of my favorite cities, and as a pseudo-resident (I still return to Ohio for summers and holidays), I feel confident recommending some of my favorite spots in the city! If you have any free time during the conference, or if you plan on coming early and staying late, I hope this guide helps you experience DC to the fullest!

The International Spy Museum



The International Spy Museum is “dedicated to the tradecraft, history and contemporary role of espionage.”

Located just between Penn Quarter and Chinatown, this museum features the largest collection of espionage artifacts currently on display! The Spy Museum educates the public about espionage in an engaging way and provides context that foster understanding of its important role in and impact on current and historic events. Experience the life of a spy with interactive exhibits like Operation Spy, or adopt a secret identity in the Covers & Legends section. Discover the work of famous spies and pivotal espionage actions, and experience strategies and techniques that made those actions possible! For more information, visit <http://www.spymuseum.org>. 800 F St. N.W., Washington, D.C., 20004

The Phillips Collection

The Phillips Collection, located just north of Dupont Circle, offers superb works of modern art in an intimate setting. In 1921, Duncan Phillips love of art spurred his decision to turn the Phillips family home into a modern and contemporary art museum displaying artists like Renoir, Rothko, Bonnard, O’Keeffe, and van Gogh. The Phillips continues to

grow and develop with selective new acquisitions. Hours, ticketing, and current exhibits can be found on the Phillips Collection Website (<http://www.phillipscollection.org>). 1600 21st Street N.W., Washington D.C., 20009



Newseum

Since The Newseum’s Washington, D.C. opening in April 2008, the museum has garnered outstanding reviews from media professionals, travel leaders, educators, and hundreds of thousands of visitors from around the world. The Newseum’s mission is to champion the five freedoms of the First Amendment through the exhibits that fill its halls, both permanent, like The 9/11 Gallery, and traveling, like “Inside Today’s FBI.” Peruse the Pulitzer-Prize Winning Photographs, experience the Interactive Newsroom, and enjoy the stunning rooftop views of the National Mall and Capitol Building. For more information, please visit <http://www.newseum.org/>. 551 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20001

United States Capitol

Visit the United States Capitol while you enjoy the Nation's Capital! The U.S. Capitol Visitor Center offers guided tours through the historic Capitol, including the Crypt, the Rotunda, and the National Statuary Hall. The tour also begins and ends at the Capitol Visitor Center, where you can view the exhibitions or watch a film about the America's journey to establish the world's first truly representative democracy. During your visit, you can also partake in special tours and activities like the Brumidi Corridors Tours of the first floor of the Senate wing, or visit the viewing galleries of the House of Representatives and the Senate. For information about reserving tickets, hours, special activities and tours, please visit the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center Website at <http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/plan-visit/>.

Eastern Market

On Saturday & Sunday mornings, Eastern Market is crawling with cool local artists, bakers, coffee roasters, and farmers. It might be cold, but if you bundle up and hop on the Blue/Orange/Silver lines to the Eastern Market stop, it's a short walk to the market and close to a lot of great brunch restaurants. Make sure you save time to explore the surrounding area, including the ultimate book lover's haven, Capitol Hill Books! For more information about travel and hours, check the Eastern Market Website (<http://www.easternmarket-dc.org>). 225 7th St. S.E., Washington, DC 20003



Georgetown

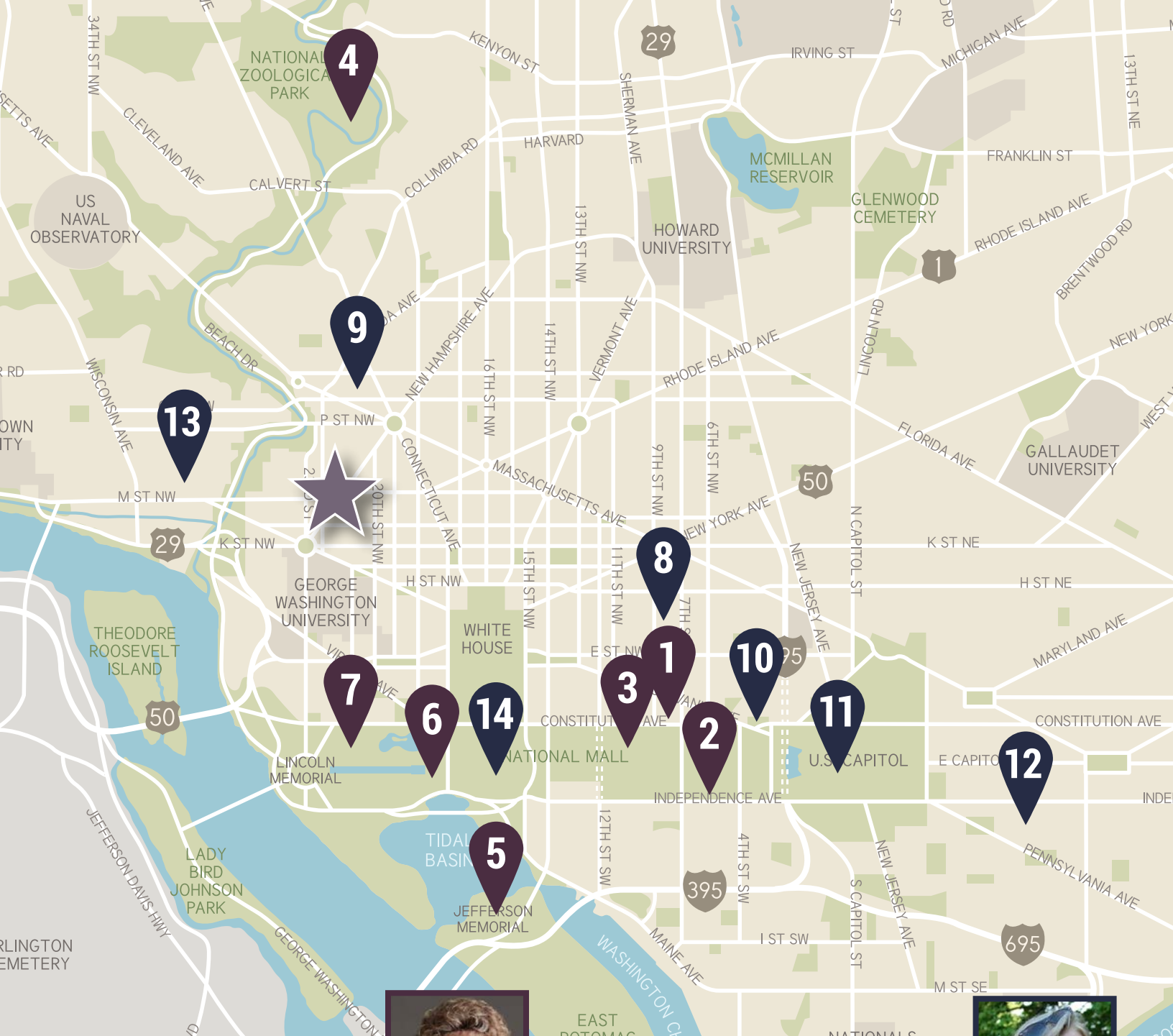
Enjoy the scenery and shopping Georgetown has to offer while enjoying (the best) cupcakes and hot cocoa! Baked & Wired is nestled between M Street and the Georgetown Waterfront. Pick up some coffee and treats to keep warm before exploring the waterfront, with great views of The Kennedy Center and Roosevelt Island, or while walking along the historic canal. It's also great for a mid-shopping pick-me-up as you work your way through all that Georgetown has to offer! Bonus - it's just down the street from your hotel and most shops are open until 9 PM. For more information about all that Georgetown has to offer, visit <https://www.visit.georgetown.org/>. Baked & Wired can be found at 1052 Thomas Jefferson St. N.W., Washington DC 20007.

The Washington Monument

The Washington Monument is home to one of the best views in Washington, D.C. Visitors may tour the 500' level observation deck inside

the historic monument for stunning views spanning far beyond the National Mall. Ticketholders will also be able to experience the museum level where historic photographs and modern views invite you to learn more about Washington – the man, the monument, and city! Tickets are required to go up the Monument and can be reserved on the website for a fee of \$1.00, or visitors can pick up free tickets on a first-come, first-serve basis. For details and hours of operation, please refer to the National Park Services (<http://www.nps.gov/wamo/planyourvisit/index.htm>).

March may seem dreary and cold, but I guarantee that getting out and about in the Nation's Capital is worth braving the weather! I hope that this guide and Angela's top Smithsonian and Monument picks help you find a new favorite activity in the district! I hope you enjoy the 24th Annual Meeting, but mostly, I hope you don't forget to enjoy D.C. too! ■

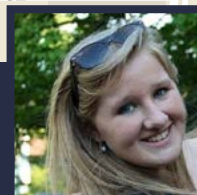


ANGELA'S PICKS



1. National Archives Museum
2. Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum
3. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History
4. Smithsonian National Zoo
5. Thomas Jefferson Memorial
6. National War World II Memorial
7. Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

MAREN'S PICKS



8. The International Spy Museum
9. The Phillips Collection
10. The Newseum
11. United States Capitol
12. Eastern Market
13. Georgetown
14. The Washington Monument



ASK THE LAWYER

Q&A

with Michael J. Sacopulos, JD,
Medical Risk Institute

Collateral Damage: Dealing with Children of Divorced Parents

QUESTION: How should practices handle the accounts of children with divorced parents? Who is responsible for medical fees and how should the matter be handled?

ANSWER: I remember many years ago sitting in the back of a courtroom waiting for my case to be called. While I waited, the Judge handled a child support case. Neither the husband nor the wife had an attorney. The Judge listened patiently to the bickering. Finally, the Judge had enough. In a rather loud voice he announced “Mr. X, it is not reasonable to think that this court or any other creditor should have to make special allowances for your divorce. After all, we are not the ones that married her.” I did not have to wait long for my case to be called after that.

I am asked your question about responsibilities for payment of services provided to children of divorced parents with some regularity. A former spouse may say “My ex is responsible for all medical expenses, for our daughter. Send the bill to him.” Between the ex-spouses, that may be true. However, under the laws of most, if not all states, both parents remain responsible for the medical expenses of their minor children. Your practice is not obligated to collect its fees from only one of your minor patient’s parents. Your practice can collect the full fee from either parent. However, the parents then may have rights amongst themselves to sort the matter out. The divorce decree applies to the parents/former spouses and not to your practice.

Philip I. Adler has served as a Superior Court Judge in Indiana for many years. His Court predominately

handled divorce and child custody issues. Judge Adler has ruled on literally hundreds of divorces during his career. “I did not see the issue come up too frequently.” Judge Adler may not have experienced this issue too frequently in his Court because most states have a formula that sets forth how children’s medical expenses are to be divided amongst ex-spouses. But just because state law specifies how expenses are to be divided amongst the parents of divorced children, it does not mean that your practice is forced to comply with that formula. The mother and the father are both responsible for their child’s medical expenses.

Closely related to the above question is the issue of the parents’ ability to receive copies of their child’s medical records and prescriptions. Occasionally, one parent requests the practice not provide medical information regarding the child to the other parent. You will not be surprised to learn that since both parents are financially responsible for their child’s medical care, that they are both entitled to copies of the child’s medical records.

So despite what one of the ex-spouses may tell you, your practice can collect for its services against either parent and provide copies of medical records and prescriptions for your patient to either parent. Do not let your practice become collateral damage to someone’s divorce. ■



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