



Getting the Media to Deliver Your Messages

Provincial Round Table - June 14, 2013



Dr. Brenda Hefford being interviewed as part of the A GP for Me announcement.

Do I have to do this on my own?

The provincial Communications team always welcomes the opportunity to work with you to support your media relations efforts in a way that works for you. If you so choose, communications can help with any or all of the following:

- Identify whether your story is likely to garner media attention.
- Work with you to pitch your story to the media, including the preparation of news releases, media advisories and media fact sheets.
- Proactively contact reporters with background information, negotiate interview parameters, time and location.
- Help craft your key messages with you for media interviews.
- Provide practice interviews.
- Offer advice when you receive an unexpected call from a journalist.
- Arrange local media training for your spokespeople so you are prepared when you're ready to get your division's stories out through the media.
- Monitor media coverage.

How do we get our division in the news?

There are two main kinds of media relations:

1. **Proactive** – The division approaches the media to pitch a story idea.
 - These are usually good news stories.
 - You have control over when the idea is pitched, but not whether a story will run or what it will say.
2. **Reactive** – Media contact a division for comment on a topic they are writing a story about.
 - This may be for an expert viewpoint on a medical-related story or on another more contentious issue.
 - The division may not expect the media call and will have less time to prepare messaging than with proactive stories.
 - If doing the interview doesn't meet your objectives you do not need to say yes.

Why should we approach the media with our proactive stories?

Benefits of profiling division initiatives in the news:

- Providing the community with information that can benefit patients and their families.
- Positioning the division as the voice of primary care in the community.
- Demonstrating results to stakeholders, including members and prospective members.

How should we approach the media with our proactive stories?

Step 1: determine if the story is newsworthy

- Divisions' provincial communications team can help with this.
- Evaluate whether the story idea is truly newsworthy rather than just of interest to division members and better suited to a newsletter or section in the annual report.

Questions to ask in determining if a story is newsworthy:

- Is something being launched or introduced? If so, will it impact a large number of the people who may read/watch/listen to this news?
- Is the idea about something that is of importance to the media's consumers? (such as improvements to the health care system in the community).
- Is it timely? Does the story relate to issues currently being covered in the news?

If **"yes"** to any of above, proceed to step two.

If **"no"** to all of above, do not approach the media. There is a lot of competition for media attention and if a division becomes known for pitching solid stories, reporters are more likely to be receptive to future story ideas. The opposite is also true.



Step 2: determine what kind of media to approach

If a story idea is solid, the division will then want to determine what kind of media to approach:

- **Print** – Daily, weekly or semi-weekly newspaper. Most outlets also have online versions of their publications. Visuals are helpful, but not required. Interviews can be done by phone.
- **Radio** – News stories and local radio programs. Visuals are not required and most interviews will be done by phone but spokespeople can be asked to come into the studio.
- **Television** – Strong visuals are required, making it the hardest kind of coverage to secure.

Step 3: decide how to approach reporters

- **Phone pitch** – Target your call to a specific reporter or groups of reporters and “pitch” the story.
 - Be brief (think elevator pitch).
 - Get to the point of why it’s a story for them and why people should care.
- **News release** - The most common media relations tool is the news release, which summarizes all pertinent information in a standard format.
- **Media advisory** - If a division is hosting a newsworthy event with a strong visual component, it can craft a media advisory with the details and send it out several days before the event.

No matter what the approach, it is critical that you have someone available during business hours to do interviews with interested journalists. It is wise to call and follow-up on both advisories and releases to ensure they are brought to the media’s attention.

If a division has any questions about approaching media or would like assistance, the provincial Divisions communications team can help.

How should we handle calls from the media looking for us to react to a story?

What to do when the media calls

- While it is poor etiquette not to respond immediately to media calls, buy time. If a reporter contacts a division unexpectedly, they are most likely looking for comment on a story they are already working on. It is possible there may be a contentious aspect to it.
 - Let the reporter know that you or someone else will call them back within their deadline.
 - This will give the spokesperson time to gather their thoughts and prepare.
 - The provincial communications team can help with messaging/preparations for an interview.
- Everyone who answers the division’s phone must be aware of the following policy: nobody other than designated spokespeople are permitted to speak on the division’s behalf. Regardless of who answers the call – an office assistant or the spokesperson – the following questions should be asked (very politely, of course):
 - What media outlet are you calling from? (If they haven’t already mentioned it.)
 - May I have your name? (Ask for spelling if it is not obvious).
 - Can you give me some background on the focus of your story?
 - What kind of information are you looking for from us?

- What is your deadline?
- May I have your contact number?
- It is a good idea to reach out to the provincial Divisions communications office for guidance before returning media calls.
 - Depending on the topic, it may be more appropriate for a provincial spokesperson to respond.
 - If a reporter leaves a voicemail message, the provincial team can contact them and ask the above questions.
- **Develop key messages on the issue.**
 - Write them down, and have them close by for when you speak with the reporter. This will help keep you on track. Don't be afraid to repeat the key messages.
 - Consider the benefits of notifying the provincial communications team for help in developing messages. The provincial team may be able to provide context on the reporter or to the reporter's inquiry.

What should we know about the interview?

- **Preparation is key:**
 - Know your key messages.
 - Practice saying your key messages in answers out loud (the communications department is always available to provide a practice session).
 - Think in brief quotes. If what you want to say can be summed up in one sentence, what would you say?
- **During the interview:**
 - Only talk about the division's perspective, and always be honest. Don't speculate on the future or what your partners (health authorities or community organizations) might think. Simply say, "You'll have to speak with them to find out their thoughts."
 - Don't use jargon.
 - Never guess if you don't know.
 - Keep answers relatively short – think 20 second sound bite.
 - Remember you are responsible for the answers, not the questions.
 - Be proactive about weaving your message into your answer even if you weren't asked the question directly – don't feel obliged to answer to suit the interviewer.
 - Don't be drawn into speculation (for example, "if a doctor or patient were to... what would you do?").
 - Don't be drawn into getting angry or emotional no matter how combative the questions get.
 - Don't be drawn into providing your "personal opinion".
 - Never repeat the negative in the question (think Nixon's, "I am not a crook").
 - There is no 'off the record'. Everything you say will be on the record. When in doubt, leave it out.

What happens after our spokesperson does the interview?

- When it comes to media, there is no guarantee a story will run, even if an interview takes place. This is especially true with softer, proactive stories which routinely get bumped for more immediate, hard news.



Divisions of Family Practice

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- A division will also have no ability to vet the story beforehand. The only thing in the division's full control is what the spokesperson says.
- Local coverage can be added to your divisions' website.