

UNIVERSITIES ALLIED FOR ESSENTIAL MEDICINES

Background on Working with the Media: General Advice



Media is one of the most important allies in our efforts. But working with the media is a bit of an art. Here are some additional general pointers:

Contacts: Your group should designate one or two people to serve as the primary media contact who will be responsible for all communication with the media on behalf of the group. Contacts should be good at articulating the issues, and dedicated to forming relationships and following up with media.

Record Keeping: The media contact should be sure to record contacts so you know who you've talked to and when. The best place to do this, so we can coordinate nationally, is the UAEM Master Press List:

<http://spreadsheets.google.com/ccc?key=pZ3AQ2LF4eMaGFES58WMIOQ>

- user name: UAEMStudent
- password: access2meds

Relationships: Reporters are people too, and work with people they know, like, and believe to be credible. Keep this in mind, and make friends! Also, speak carefully and in ways that maintain your credibility—and that of the organization—for the long run.

Keep it Simple: When you're talking to reporters, think how you would explain issues to your grandmother (unless your grandma is an expert in the field). Recognize that quotes are typically one sentence long—two at the most—so think about how to say things in ways that make for good, easy to understand quotes. Also, include your name, contact information, and date in everything you send out.

Practice: If you're calling to make a pitch to a reporter, practice delivering your opening few sentences a couple times beforehand. It will make you feel more comfortable when the reporter picks up the phone.

Breathe: As you're delivering a pitch or talking through an issue, be sure to give reporters the chance to interrupt you and steer you in the directions that are interesting to them. While you want to control your own message, you also want to make sure you are talking about things that are interesting to the reporter—and therefore more likely for them to write about.

Say "I Don't Know.": If a reporter asks a question you're not sure on, there's no shame in telling them you'll follow up. It's much better than "faking it" and then saying something you later wish you hadn't.

"On Background": If you ever want the freedom to explain an issue to a reporter without worrying about wordsmithing every sentence you say so it can't be taken out of context, just tell the reporter you want to talk "on background." This means he or she can use the content of what you say, but won't attribute it to you, and won't use specific quotes. Reporters don't mind this at all, so long as you are willing to talk with them "on the record" for at least part of the conversation.

Follow-Up Information: Whenever you work or meet with the press, it's good to have information beyond the initial release or talking points at the ready if they want to learn more. Don't stress about this, but do keep relevant background information (like that included in this packet), articles, and other work you've done in the past on hand to feed to them.

Letters to the Editor: You can continue to involve the media over time even if you don't have time to draft a full editorial or have a newsworthy event planned. Watch for relevant news hooks, and be ready

to send a quick, short letter-to-the-editor in response to a story or opinion article. Include your phone number so that editors can contact you for verification if they choose to print it.

Broadcast Media: Everything in this packet is mostly geared towards print media—but don't feel you have to limit yourself. Be creative—think of photo opportunities. If working with radio or TV journalists (including campus radio or TV) think about “sound bites”—10-second blurbs that capture your messages. In preparing for a live broadcast, figure out what you want your answer to the first question to be in advance. It doesn't really matter what the question turns out to be, you'll be able to make your headline point sound relevant. And again, don't expect much time—in a “five minute” live interview, you may get only 60 seconds of talk time or less.