



SECTION EIGHTEEN

MEDIA RELATIONS

Emergency physicians can have a significant impact on the legislative process through the news media, using a variety of techniques and powerful communication tools. Conducting media relations and developing relationships with reporters are powerful means of accomplishing your strategic objectives and affecting the perceptions and behaviors of elected officials.

The news media has undergone a tremendous transformation in the past decade. Fewer reporters cover more beats, which means they may be less knowledgeable about the issues you care about. They have less time to devote to news stories, because the news cycle moves at lightning speed. In addition, they have less time to participate in press events.

Social media has had a significant impact on the way the news media communicates. For example, print media not only publish print stories, they produce video stories for their websites. They also have blogs, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages. Broadcast media not only produce stories that are aired on television, they publish print stories and employ social media tools to engage their viewers.

Social media has transformed the way people receive news and communicate. This presents opportunities, as well as challenges, for all organizations.

Many tools and strategies are available for your ACEP chapter to deliver messages

effectively. These communications tools are discussed in this chapter.

Press Release

One of the most valuable tools for delivering your messages to the news media is the press release. This traditional means of communication is still one of the most important ways of conveying information, even though the means of delivery is now electronic, and it often includes hyperlinks and may be accompanied by video, photos and other background materials.

Writing an effective press release can help you present your messages in a way that generates positive press coverage. Conversely, if a press release is poorly worded or in the wrong format, it can signal that your organization is less credible.

The *Associated Press Stylebook* is the guidebook that all reporters use for writing and editing. You also should use this as your writing stylebook for communicating with the news media.

Press releases are influential documents, so take the same time and effort to prepare them, as you would with a scientific article or an important patient record.

Two of the most important parts of a press release are the headline and the first paragraph — also called the “lead” paragraph.

Reporters look at these first to decide whether or not to continue reading. You need to capture their attention right away.

The lead paragraph should summarize, in one or two sentences, what the press release is about and provide some details (the classic who, what, where, when, and why).

Journalists debate over what is considered “newsworthy,” but key factors include:

- News hook. This is the most important part of any press release. You must have a news hook to generate coverage. News hooks include surprising results of a new study, tips or “how-to” advice, announcement of a major achievement or your response to a breaking news story.
- Timing. Are other stories in the news about the same issue? If so, then reporters may be looking for new angles. Is it a seasonal topic? If so, then reporters may be looking for stories about it. Also, the timing of distribution matters. If possible, distribute before 3:00 pm in your time zone (if a local release), because most reporters are in meetings or on deadline for filing stories in the late afternoon. Distribute during weekdays when most reporters are working. If you distribute a release on Friday, realize that means the story may run over the weekend or possibly be bumped until the next week.
- Significance. Does the news affect a lot of people, or do a lot of people need to know about it?
- Local angle. Quoting a local spokesperson or having local data will increase the perceived newsworthiness in a local media market.
- Novelty. There’s an old saying in the news business, “When a dog bites a man, no one cares. When the man bites back – now that’s a news story.” You can increase the likelihood of generating coverage by being provocative or novel.

- Controversy. Is there conflict? People and reporters are naturally interested in conflict.
- Call to action. Especially for advocacy press releases, include a call to action.

The following are general tips for writing press releases. See example of a press release with an acceptable format at the end of this chapter. Also see *Speak Out! A Grassroots Guide to Promoting Emergency Medicine* for additional tips.

- Consider using a press release distribution service, such as PR Newswire or US Newswire. Otherwise, obtain a media list from national ACEP. The list will provide you with e-mail addresses in an Excel spreadsheet, which you can cut and paste into an e-mail (if you e-mail to a large list, you should paste the addresses in the blind copy portion of the email).
- Use an electronic letterhead if you are writing for your chapter. If letterhead is not available, include the name and address of your organization.
- Include contact information (especially telephone) in case reporters have questions or want to do interviews. This contact person does not have to conduct interviews, but must be able to link reporters with physicians willing to be quoted. Include any of your social media sites that you would like the press to visit. Identify and prepare your spokespersons in advance.
- Most press releases are “For Immediate Release.” Embargoes may be used when studies are released, but are used less because most reporters today want to post news as soon as they receive it.
- After the lead paragraph, use a pyramid structure that leads with the most important information first, then provides more detailed supporting information.
- Use short, declarative words, sentences and paragraphs that make direct points.

Avoid jargon, and don't drift away from the subject or try to cover too many points.

- Use quotes from key leaders, starting in the second paragraph. Quotes tend to liven up the copy and emphasize points more strongly.
- Spell out the first use of any acronym.
- At the end of the release, type “# # #” to signal the release has concluded.

Multimedia News Release

The downsizing of news organizations and the growth of social media mean that journalists are looking for more than just text press releases.

Multimedia news releases can include a written press release, as well as a 60-second video featuring an expert, along with B-roll (video footage), photographs, and PDFs of reports or brochures, plus links to background materials.

This is a way to encourage news organizations to cover your issues by giving them something extra to work with. The aim is to attract favorable media attention and to make it as easy as possible for journalists to cover your story.

Interviews

Interviews are key tools for advocacy and for promoting emergency medicine in the news. Select spokespersons from your chapter who are strong communicators and willing to communicate your key messages. Help them prepare by developing talking points on your key issues and encouraging them to take an ACEP media training class. For more tips on interviews, see *Speak Out! A Grassroots Guide to Promoting Emergency Medicine*.

Messages and Talking Points

Develop three to four key messages on your top issues that can be incorporated into talking points to be used in press materials and by your spokespersons in interviews. The key to getting your message across is repetition.

For ACEP's national talking points on key issues, visit the advocacy tab of ACEP.org.

Website

Today's journalists expect organizations to have on-line newsrooms on their websites. An on-line newsroom should contain the press releases of your organization and contact information. In addition, include fact sheets about important issues, photos, embedded video files, audio files, key reports, links to background information and links to your social media sites.

Media Relations

Developing relationships with the news media generates credibility and trust, which can translate into increased press coverage. It's also not as difficult or time consuming as it might seem. A public relations professional can help you employ effective strategies to reach your target audiences and develop press materials that are newsworthy. However, you also can be effective by employing some basic strategies on your own.

- Target and maintain a contact list of key journalists. Know what they write about. E-mail “thank you” messages or positive comments when they write good news stories.
- Make them aware of who you are and offer to be a source for them about emergency care issues. Make sure you have spokespersons willing to conduct interviews before you make this contact.
- Most journalists prefer the first contact to be by e-mail, but phone calls also are a valid tool. Don't contact after 3:00 pm when most journalists are on deadline. Always be concise in your contacts, and don't make multiple contacts with information they are not interested in. Otherwise, you risk being perceived as a “press pest.”
- When a reporter calls you, respond quickly — within an hour, if possible.

Otherwise, they will move on to other sources.

For more tips on media relations, see *Speak Out! A Grassroots Guide to Promoting Emergency Medicine*.

Letters to the Editor/Op-Eds

Letters to the editor express your views about recently published articles or editorials. They are easier to get published than op-eds, because there is less competition.

Both are valuable because they inform a broad segment of the public about your issues and concerns. Surveys show these letters are among the most-read features in any newspaper, and they also can be an effective form of lobbying because they are likely to come to the attention of lawmakers.

Most legislators assign staff members to scan the editorial pages of the major and capital city newspapers of their states looking for news about the issues they care about.

To increase the chances of your letter appearing among a paper's letters to the editor, remember the following:

- Follow exactly the newspaper's directions for submission. Specific instructions are on the newspaper's website. If you ignore the rules, the editors will ignore you. Letters are typically 200 words or less. Op-eds are typically longer. Tie your letter with a news story published on the day you submit the letter. The faster you submit a letter, the more likely it will be published.
- Be concise and avoid complex language. Write for a fifth-grade level. Make your first sentence brief and compellingly catchy. Consider illustrating your point with a new statistic or relevant personal story based on your experience as an emergency physician.
- Start with a positive message, even if you write to criticize
- Don't repeat negative statements in your letter. Instead, indicate that you are

correcting the record and state the correction.

- Consider using a policymaker's name in your letter if appropriate. That also will get their attention.
- You must provide your full name, a phone number and an email address. They will use this information only to verify that you submitted the letter, and to let you know if/when your letter will be published.

You most likely will be contacted by the newspaper within a day or two if your letter is to be published. You likely will not hear from the newspaper if the editors are not going to publish your letter. Wait a few days before submitting to another newspaper. Don't be discouraged if your letter is not published. It sometimes takes several attempts. Never send the same letter simultaneously to multiple newspapers in the same media market.

Audio News Releases

ANRs are press releases for radio. They can be highly effective for generating broadcast stories with your messages. Unlike paid advertising, ANRs are offered to radio stations, which choose to use them or not. You will need the following to produce and distribute an ANR

- A service to help you write, record and distribute the release. It typically costs \$5,000 to \$6,000 for a national release.
- A release that is exactly one minute in length and includes voiceover (provided by the service) with quotes.
- A spokesperson to record the quotes.
- A release that is concise with a straightforward message.

The ANR can be provided to you as an MP3 audio file, which you can post to your website or social media site.

Press Conferences

Your main objective when reaching out to the media is to generate press coverage on your issues that reflect your key messages. The traditional press conference used to be one of the most popular tools for doing this.

However, in a new age of electronic communications and social media, the press conference is fast becoming a communications tool of the past. It's much too easy for reporters to get everything they need without leaving their desks. News organizations have had drastic budget cuts, which means reporters can't attend every press conference in person. Exceptions to this trend include press conferences by the President of the United States or breaking news involving scandals and crises.

Hold a press conference only if there is important news to break. Realize you are taking a risk, because your news will be one of hundreds of items considered for coverage by a newsroom — most are not covered.

Offer ways for reporters to cover stories without having to physically be present at events. Consider hosting a live event via the web (Webinar) or a conference call for the press. Make it as easy as possible for journalists to do their jobs.

Tips on Press Conferences

If you decide to host a press event, spend time and attention on the details and logistics to ensure its success. The following are general tips. These do not necessarily apply in all circumstances, such as a crisis communications situation.

- **Scheduling:** In setting a date, seek to avoid competition with other news events. Scan the news and Internet for possible conflicts — it's helpful if you can gain access to the Associated Press daybook, a schedule of news events that reporters review to plan their activities.
- Set the time of the press conference between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm local

time.

Keep an open mind that cancellations happen and schedules change. Plus, when breaking news happens — all bets are off. Press conferences should last a half hour to 45 minutes, and no longer than one hour, including a reasonable period of time for Q&A.

- **Location:** Identify a central, easily accessible place that can accommodate several dozen (or more) people, plus television cameras. The facility should have sufficient lighting and be able to accommodate a sound system and the needs of electronic media. Consider using a visual backdrop, such as a hospital or emergency department, which can spark interest by television media. Try to match the size of the room to the expected attendance. Consider inviting representatives of supportive organizations and colleagues to sit in any empty seats, especially if you know TV cameras will be there.
- **Room Set-Up:** There are various ways to set up the room. For example, you could have a simple podium (if more than one speaker, they could stand and take turns speaking) or a podium with a head table with chairs for multiple speakers. You could set up 30 chairs for reporters and leave space at the back for television cameras. At the very least, you need lighting, a sound system with microphones or wireless mics and electrical outlets for broadcast media. If you plan to use PowerPoint, you will need a monitor/screen, laptop and LCD projector. Have a press table at the entrance to the room to register press and distribute press kits. Consider visuals, such as posters. It is highly recommended to have a technical person available during the press conference to trouble shoot any problems with the lighting, the PowerPoint or the electronics.

On the day of the event:

- Arrive well in advance to make sure the room is set up correctly. Have press kits ready. Press kits should include an agenda, a press release and biographies of the speakers. You could also include background materials, including statements by your spokespersons and copies of PowerPoint slides. A representative of your organization should greet reporters at the door and ask them to sign in.
- Begin promptly at the stated time. Reporters, like most professionals, become irritated when kept waiting.
- Have your spokesperson introduce himself/herself and welcome attendees. He or she should open with a brief statement or overview about the subject of the press conference and introduce any other speakers.
- When the statements are concluded, the first spokesperson should open the session for questions from the floor. Keep the press conference statements short and provide adequate time for reporter questions.

Remember, there are risks to any press conference. In addition to the risk of having an empty room, your spokesperson, for example, could undergo public interrogation. Make sure your spokespersons are prepared to handle difficult questions. To do this, anticipate difficult questions in advance and formulate potential responses. Hold a rehearsal the day before and practice using these questions.

For more tips on conducting a press conference, see *Speak Out! A Grassroots Guide to Promoting Emergency Medicine*.

Types of News Media

The following are the general types of news media with tips for dealing with each.

Print Media

Print media traditionally consist of newspapers (daily, weekly), magazines, journals and newsletters. Today's print media also have websites, which may include video stories, blog stories, a Facebook page and a Twitter feed. Communicating with the news media means reaching out to all these facets.

Most print interviews are conducted over the phone with a reporter who may be taking notes or recording the interview to ensure accuracy. Remember that you are always on the record with a reporter unless it is specifically agreed to prior to the interview. Otherwise, what you say is fair game.

If asked to do a print interview, find out:

- What does the reporter want to discuss? (so you can be prepared)
- How long will the interview take? (It's best to set a reasonable limit, such as 15 minutes, unless you feel comfortable taking time to educate the reporter or building a relationship.)
- Has the reporter talked with other people before talking with you? If so, who were they? (This can give you insight into the reporter's angle.)

Always take time to prepare for an interview. Decide what your key messages will be. Never conduct an interview without preparing.

Radio

There are thousands of radio stations in America. Some are local, and some are national, such as CNN Radio and Wall Street Journal Radio. Some are statewide radio networks, such as the Ohio News Network, and some are affiliated with national news networks, such as ABC Radio. Some are publicly funded stations affiliated with National Public Radio, such the Florida Public Radio Network.

Today's radio stations have websites with print stories and employ social media, such as blogs and Facebook to engage listeners.

Most radio interviews are conducted by telephone or in a studio. If you are asked to do a radio interview, find out:

- What is the topic? What kinds of questions will be asked?
- Will the interview be live or taped and how long will it take? If taped, then when will it air?
- Will other people be interviewed at the same time (a panel discussion)?
- Will there be listener call-in?
- Who will conduct the interview? For example, will it be a local personality with a controversial reputation? Make sure you know how to pronounce the person's name.
- Will the interview be on a talk radio show or during the news?

Television

The television industry includes national networks, such as ABC, CBS, FOX and NBC, which have locally owned and operated stations, as well as affiliate stations, in cities across the country. The industry also includes cable networks, such as Fox News, CNN, MSNBC and ESPN. These networks are owned by larger parent companies. Public broadcasting stations have a mission to enlighten the public. They receive funding from sources including the general public and corporations.

Today's television stations also have websites that include print stories, along with social media, such as blog stories and Twitter feeds.

If asked to do a television interview, find out:

- What is the topic? What kinds of questions will be asked?
- Will the interview be conducted in a studio or remotely? Or will a news crew come to your location?

Television is a visual medium, so reporters are looking for interesting

visual environments and activities, such as an emergency department.

- If you are going into the studio, will a makeup artist be available to help you look your best for the camera?
- Will the interview be live or taped and how long will it take? (Again, set boundaries on the time you will be available.)
- If it's taped, how does the station plan to edit it?
- What kind of format, such as one-on-one interview or a panel discussion?
- When will the story air?

Again, always take time to prepare for an interview. Decide what your key messages will be. Never conduct an interview without preparing.

Wire Services

Wire services, such as Associated Press, Bloomberg Business News and Reuters, provide news stories to news organizations that subscribe to their services. As the news industry has evolved, other kinds of services have evolved, such as Kaiser Health News, which is a nonprofit news organization that provides news stories about health policy issues to their subscribers.

If you want to invite the news media to an upcoming event, notify the daybook editor of wire services in your state, especially Associated Press. AP distributes a daily schedule to its subscribers. Local editors and reporters scan this daybook for ideas on where to assign reporters.

To be considered for inclusion in the daybook, send information in a media advisory about the event at least one week in advance. Be sure to include facts on the nature of the event; its purpose, location, and time; and the name and telephone number of a person to contact for more information. For more information about media advisories, see *Speak Out! A Grassroots Guide to Promoting Emergency Medicine*.

Web Media

More and more mainstream publications are going to an all-web format, for example, *The Huffington Post*. It's operated primarily the same as print publications, but everything is on the web exclusively and not in print.

One of the benefits of this is that news can be posted online in an instant and the public does not have to wait for an article to appear in print. Another benefit is that unlike most print articles, web articles can be changed instantly if a correction needs to be made.

Social Media

Social media and mobile technologies have changed the way people receive information and news.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular of all social media tools. It allows you to create a personal account or an organization fan page. It creates an environment in which your members can interact with you and with each other.

If you develop a Facebook Fan page for your organization, it's important to promote this page to your members and keep refreshing the content to keep people engaged. You can use Facebook to promote and link materials for others to see and comment on.

Twitter

Twitter has grown in popularity in just a few years. This online social network service enables its users to send/ "tweet" and read text-based posts of up to 140 letter characters. This is great platform to promote new data and news from your organization. An example of a Twitter "tweet": Great story in [@LATimes](#) by Noam Levey on ER care, uninsured, [#EMTALA](#). <http://lat.ms/MFdng> . This simple, short and to the point format quickly shows the subject and then links to other

material. Use a website such as www.tinyurl.com to shrink an otherwise long URL web address into fewer characters that will fit into a Twitter format. Like Facebook, Twitter also has the ability to reach tens of thousands if not millions of people around the world.

YouTube

YouTube is a video sharing service. For example, if you produce a video featuring your president, you can then upload it to a YouTube page that you create. Say you use the term "emergency medicine" in your video title. When someone types in "emergency medicine" into YouTube, they may see your video. Basically, YouTube has given anyone in the world who wants one – their own television station.

Monitoring Media Coverage

Some organizations find it helpful to monitor their press coverage through a clipping service, such as BurrellesLuce or Cision. These services hire people to review news coverage in every medium that might carry your message – and find it for you.

You can also use Google Alerts, which is a free notification service operated by Google. It automatically notifies use when new content from news, web, blogs, video and discussion groups appear on the Internet. You can set up an account and automatically search on key words, such as your organization's name, or "college of emergency medicine" or "emergency medicine." When these terms pop up in the news, you will get an email alert with the link. It can be very beneficial for tracking media coverage.



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MOST PEOPLE VISIT THE ER BECAUSE “ONLY A HOSPITAL COULD HELP;” CDC REPORT HIGHLIGHTS LACK OF ACCESS TO CARE

WASHINGTON —The president of the American College of Emergency Physicians, David Seaberg, MD, FACEP, today issued a statement in response to a new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding emergency department use among adults aged 18 to 64 in 2011. The report focuses on a subset of the least sick and injured patients; it does not include the elderly, children or patients admitted to the hospital from the emergency department.

“This confirms the results of a recent ACEP poll in which 85 percent of Americans with regular health care providers who visited the ER said they could not have waited to see their regular providers. The CDC report draws similar conclusions, even though it excludes the nearly 27 percent of emergency patients admitted to the hospital who are, by definition, the sickest patients. It also excludes seniors who tend to have more complicated health problems and are more likely to be admitted to the hospital from the ER.

“With those groups excluded, the report still finds more than half (54.5 percent) of adults going to the emergency department because ‘only a hospital could help.’ And two-thirds (66 percent) reported visiting the ER because of the seriousness of their medical problem. The majority of patients (79.7 percent) also identified lack of access to other medical providers as a reason for visiting the ER, which is backed up by other data from the CDC showing two-thirds of emergency visits happen after normal business hours.

“No matter how we slice and dice the data, the results always say the same thing: people come to the ER because they feel they need to be there. No patient should be self-diagnosing his or her medical condition. They cannot distinguish between discomfort that is a minor problem and discomfort that could be a killer. That is the emergency physician’s job.

“We treat 135 million patients a year, 92 percent of whom need care within 2 hours, and we do it all for two cents out of every American health care dollar. When people think they are having emergencies – whether it’s in the middle of the night or on a Tuesday morning – they seek emergency care because they know we will take care of them.”

ACEP is the national medical specialty society representing emergency medicine. ACEP is committed to advancing emergency care through continuing education, research and public education. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, ACEP has 53 chapters representing each state, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. A Government Services Chapter represents emergency physicians employed by military branches and other government agencies.

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