

EPDA guide to
Working with
the media



EPDA GUIDE TO... WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Media relations are a vital activity in public relations (PR) campaigns. Despite the rise in recent years of various digital forms of communication, traditional media – including television, radio and newspapers – remains a hugely powerful tool and one that not-for-profit patient organisations should look to exploit.

Although planning a media campaign and dealing with the media can appear to be a daunting challenge, it can – and should – be a simple process if you are well prepared. Designed specifically for the EPDA's member organisations, this toolkit has been developed to provide clear advice for the key stages involved in developing an effective media relations process. We hope you enjoy reading it and implementing its advice so that you are able to successfully spread the word of your excellent Parkinson's work programmes to the wider world. Good luck!



Knut-Johan Onarheim
EPDA President

SECTION 1 BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

The media is an essential means of disseminating key information and data to a range of different audiences. Not only is it a cost-effective way to communicate and amplify not-for-profit organisations' key messages, but information can also be strategically targeted to reach different audiences quickly.

In addition, endorsements of your messages by independent journalists can be more valuable than advertising thanks to the media's (sometimes) increased credibility.

“Working with the media is a cost-effective way to communicate and amplify not-for-profit organisations' key messages”

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SECTION 2 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

IDENTIFY THE RIGHT MEDIA

It is vital that you focus on media that is appropriate for your target audience. Certain sources will reach different demographics. The same is true of different age ranges.

Be careful you understand media distinctions. For Parkinson's organisations, you should be primarily interested in two contrasting forms: the 'consumer press', which means media that reaches the general public, and the 'medical press', which refers to publications that are read by medical professionals such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists.

TARGET THE RIGHT JOURNALISTS

Make sure you approach the relevant person for the type of story you want to secure. For example, are you intending to provide a news story, a feature, a commentary or an opinion piece? For the consumer media, consider whether your story should appear in the health pages or other specialist sections, such as the science, society or politics pages.

PITCHING YOUR STORY

It is always a good idea to speak to key target journalists and to 'sell' your story to them over the phone. You can follow this up by emailing a press release and any other information you have at your disposal that will help the story. Once you

know the journalist well, you can adapt how you approach them in line with their preferences. There are some basic principles for establishing and maintaining good relationships with journalists.

You must always:

- Understand the journalist's interests and needs, and respect and understand their working patterns and deadlines
- Contact them regularly – as long as you make sure the conversations are worthwhile for them
- Provide information on time
- Respond to journalists' requests, even on negative issues
- Become a helpful and informative resource, providing a source of information and stories as well trusted access to scientists, expert physicians or people with Parkinson's
- Ensure a speedy response for information
- Always respect the fact that the journalist writes the story, not you
- Encourage the journalist to listen to your story and your key messages.

You must never:

- Harass the journalist. Sometimes you will have to accept no for an answer
- Provide anything but 100% factually accurate information
- Assume your story will appear exactly as you want it to. Remember the term: 'freedom of the press'.

Make sure you brief all your spokespeople in advance so they use the same messages. If you feel comfortable answering questions, position yourself as a credible commentator. Journalists may then come to you for your opinion on other stories that are related to Parkinson's.

SECTION 3 KEY MESSAGES

It is important to identify your key messages – namely, the focus of your story and the ultimate take-home points from any coverage you hope to achieve.

A small number of succinct key messages can help to make communications more clear and concise, and will promote the overall understanding of your story. You should, therefore, write three to five short sentences that are the central communication points. These should be used in all your materials and also when contacting the media.

In order to achieve this level of communication, it is essential that you read – and re-read carefully – every single word and sentence that you write, to ensure that your audience understands everything that you are saying (and writing). It is easy to overlook the fact that what makes sense to you doesn't necessarily make sense to others. When dealing with the media, it is always 'the others' that is important.

In a media interview, do not be afraid to repeat the key messages – but ensure that you put them into context with the question asked. Repetition encourages the inclusion of key messages in any coverage and increases accuracy.

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SECTION 4 NEWS AND FEATURES

NEWS STORIES

You must ensure that the stories you are selling to journalists are of interest to their target audience and are something they would cover normally. If they are not, you will only receive polite rejections (or in some cases not even a rejection at all).

In every instance, you should alert journalists to your upcoming stories – ahead of their release. By being proactive, you will allow journalists to plan how to include the story in their publication. Remember that stories are more likely to be covered if they are 'new' or linked to a date or event. World Parkinson's Disease Day and the EPDA's European Parkinson's Action Day, for example, (both on 11 April every year) are good and timely links to sell other Parkinson's stories into the press.

It is good practice to regularly scan target publications for relevant coverage. If you notice that a particular journalist regularly covers stories about health or Parkinson's, then they will be a good contact for future stories. Get in touch to inform them about what your patient group is doing.

News events are also an opportunity to contact the media. Local Parkinson's events and meetings, new Parkinson's-related legislation or new research can be all used to sell in your story. Such topical research will also make you look a more professional and knowledgeable contact for them to use again in the future.

FEATURE STORIES

Feature articles provide more in-depth discussion of a topic. Unlike news, features don't have to be tied to new data or information. To place feature story ideas, you should attempt to:

Read your target publications to determine the types of feature articles their journalists publish as well as the writing style and their readership.

Develop story angles that will capture the attention of that publication's readers. Also include the names of potential disease experts or people with Parkinson's that are available to interview.

Ask people with Parkinson's to share their stories. Such interviews will bring your story to life, add a human angle and provide credibility for your messages.

Write a brief suggested synopsis of the story and circulate this for agreement internally among your organisation before approaching the media.

Identify the appropriate journalist. Feature articles might be handled by the features editor, the health editor or the editor. Find out who is the right person.

Be flexible and consider incorporating additional topics if it has been suggested by the publication in question.

Don't give up. It is unusual for a journalist to agree to a feature straight away. If they are still undecided, find out what their doubts or concerns are – you might need to adapt or develop the story to make it more appealing for their readers.

SECTION 5

MEDIA RESOURCES AND TACTICS

The following elements can help to strengthen and increase the credibility of your story:

CLINICAL EXPERTS

Adding quotes from Parkinson's experts can increase the credibility of a story about the disease. You can even offer journalists the opportunity to interview the expert.

PARKINSON'S ADVOCATES

People with Parkinson's can add a human perspective to the story. Again, you can offer journalists the chance of interviews.

PRESS BRIEFINGS/WEBCASTS

When you have an important news story to announce, a press briefing event is an effective way to sell it to the media. Journalists can hear the story first hand and question key participants. Hold the event in a central location so it is easily accessible to attendees. Ensure that speakers are relevant and are authorities on the subject. Prominent speakers can also attract journalists. Keep track of journalist attendees (request their contact details) so you can follow up with them after the event.

Webcasting allows you to film the event and broadcast it live over the internet. This would allow journalists that cannot attend to still email in their questions.

PRESS PACKS

At press events, it is usual to provide journalists with press materials (press releases, background information, fact sheets, speaker biographies etc). Press releases can also be distributed electronically to journalists.

PICTURES

When selling in a story, visuals – such as photographs of people with Parkinson's or experts – can help the story gain greater coverage in both print and online media. An eye-catching or unusual image can also help you increase the prominence of your story. It is essential that all the images be in focus and of a decent quality – especially for print media.

SURVEYS

You can use existing survey data to supplement your story. Local prevalence data or the opinions of people with Parkinson's can make your messages more pertinent. If needed, you can commission research from market research companies or run an online survey from your website (if available).

TV/INTERNET FOOTAGE

If your story is important enough to gain broadcast coverage, you could develop short video clips to be used on television or online. Clips of people with Parkinson's or other relevant speakers could help secure coverage. The most common format for clips are either an a-roll or b-roll. An a-roll is a complete, edited narrative that tells a story that supports your messages. A b-roll is longer and will contain a selection of clips for journalists to select and edit together as they choose.

SECTION 6

ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The online and social media phenomenon is a relatively recent but incredibly important development – particularly for not-for-profit organisations.

Many smaller publications are now only publishing online to reduce costs. At the same time, many larger print publications have also embraced up-to-the-minute websites and are continually promoting their online blogs (web-logs) that target specific topics in an attempt to capture the spirit of the age.

In addition, other online communication channels are growing in size, influence and impact. Some channels are streets ahead of their competitors and you should consider researching YouTube (a video website), and Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and MySpace (social media networks), as well as other patient-oriented websites.

BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Online media is an exceptional way to engage directly with the public in a totally unique two-way conversation. You can also reach an until-recently unthought-of number of people.

As increasing amounts of content is being passed on via word of mouth, the spread can be colossal – and can span across different regions and continents within minutes. It is also extremely cost effective (and often free).

How to place content on each of these options will depend on the respective site,

but you can do it yourself very easily. Remember to select your online media carefully as some options only reach a certain demographic, while others will only support a certain type of content. Twitter, for example, only supports text, while YouTube is a video-only medium.

Parkinson's UK is a good example of how an organisation uses a variety of online media to communicate with its audience. Use the following links to get an idea of the different mediums it uses to spread its messages and content:

- www.parkinsons.org.uk
- <http://twitter.com/parkinsonsuk>
- <http://talkparkinsons.blogspot.com>
- www.flickr.com/photos/parkinsonsuk
- www.facebook.com/parkinsonsuk

PITFALLS

There are certain pitfalls to using social media, however. The interactive nature of these sites means you do not have control over what is being said, while comments can be made and seen by anyone. Content – good or bad – can also be replicated widely across the internet and it is difficult to limit where this will go.

While becoming members of the majority of social media sites is free, there is also a lot of time investment involved – which may cost your organisation money. Sites and accounts must be updated regularly to continue to engage users, whose interest will wane if sites are static. You may also need to adapt the content to suit new developments. New online and social media are constantly being developed, updated and changed. Therefore, you must spend the necessary time to keep up to date with what is happening in order to engage effectively with your audience.

SECTION 7 TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

If talking to the media is part of your role, do not feel compelled to give an interview or to answer a journalist's questions straight away. Obtain as much information about the journalist's questions as you can in advance. For example, consider asking:

- how and when will the interview be used? And in what medium?
- what is the programme or feature intended to be about?
- what is your spokesperson's (and organisation's) role going to be within the story?
- what sort of questions will you be asked? How many?
- will the interview be live or recorded?
- who is the interviewer?
- do you have any editorial control over the final interview that is going to be broadcast or printed?

“ Consider asking a journalist specific questions such as how and when will the interview be used? And in what medium? ”

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