

## Engaging with the media: tips for review authors

Is your Cochrane review nearing publication? If so, you would have thought about the key messages for your review in writing your conclusions. Have you also considered how you might communicate these messages via alternative mediums, such as media (print, television, radio, online/social media)? Sometimes, journalists will approach you for information, at other times you will want to contact a journalist or engage with a form of media to communicate a message.

### **Developing key messages**

Key messages are the integral pieces of information you want your audience to remember. They should be clear, concise, relevant and memorable. You should develop about 3 key messages to ensure your point is clear.

Work out your objective for an interview/story. Consider: What is the general message you want to deliver? Who is your target audience? What do you want them to know/do?

In addition, there are five things you should consider prior to contacting the media.

### WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY

**WHO** can they interview? Think about whom in your research team will be interviewed. Make sure they are confident to be interviewed, possibly more than once, and that their style will not be too technical.

**WHAT** is the research about? Develop your key messages, as mentioned above.

**WHEN?** Firstly you need to work out what type of media would be most appropriate to communicate your work. Newspapers generally like an embargoed media release so give them information and interviews in the days prior. This will not be published until the day you request. However if you choose this avenue, some TV stations may not be interested, as it will be seen as 'old' news, once published. Radio is a lot more flexible as you can do phone interviews.

**WHERE?** If you are interested in getting media to cover a launch/opening/seminar, you need to consider the location. Keeping these close to the city is preferable. Suburbs, even 10-15km out of the city, may be considered as too far away for media crews to prioritise attendance. Radio can be a good target, given the lack of distance barriers.

**WHY?** Why would the media be interested in your story? Consider what is new about your work and how it will grab the attention of the general public.

## Contacting the media

To initiate media contact, you can consider developing a media release. This should be written in lay language and communicate your key messages clearly in less than one page. Securing time on the phone with a journalist may not always be possible, so having something to send to journalists means that they have a chance to read it in their own time and determine whether they are interested in hearing more. Many journalists are so pressed for time that they are willing to accept press releases almost exactly as written if they are newsworthy and appropriate for their audience.

To distribute your press release you should try the media team within your organisation (if there is one) as they will already have relationships and personal contacts at many media outlets. If they are not interested, you will need to find out contact details (searching online is probably the most effective way) for the media outlets that are of interest to you.

## Responding to media contact

- If you are contacted by a journalist, you should take their call or respond to their email as soon as possible (they are on tight deadlines)
- Ascertain the journalists credentials (name, organisation)
- Assess their requirements: do they need a short or long interview?
- Find out their angle: what sort of story are they trying to create?
- Find out who else the journalist has spoken to and what they are saying about the issue
- If you would like to comment, make this clear
- Gather relevant information and practise reciting your key messages
- When confident, contact the journalist to conduct the interview
- Deliver messages with authority
  - Do: be clear, concise, remain calm and controlled, stay 'on message', use facts and figures, use bridging phrases (see below), avoid jargon/acronyms
  - Don't: ramble, be drawn away from key messages, repeat journalist's words, argue with the journalist, go 'off the record'
- If unable to contribute, let the journalist know as soon as possible and direct them to an alternative source, if possible

## Bridging Phrases

A bridging phrase is a tool you can use to stay on track during an interview and deliver *your* key messages.

Examples:

- "Another way to look at it is..."
- "I don't have information on that but what I can tell you is..."
- "I can't speak for that person.... However, what I can say is..."
- "The most important thing of concern at the moment is..."
- "No, that is not what I'm saying. What I am saying is..."
- "This is a difficult concept for many people, but let me be very clear about this..."
- Think of your own examples that might be relevant to your topic and the way the media is likely to respond to it...