What’s Newsworthy?

Tips & Tactics for working with mass media

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"This is my new hamster. She's so neat, I notified all the news networks, Internet news sites and Grandma!"
Why do we need them?

Demonstrate our accountability to constituents
Cooperation now = softer touch later (crisis)

Share how we are changing what’s possible
Third party credibility
Classic excuses

• I don’t have time.
• They always get it wrong.
• What if I’m misquoted or taken out of context?
• I don’t see why they need me in the story
• Can’t we just interview over the phone/email?
• Can we do it tomorrow?
• I need the questions before hand.
The more “open” you are, the better...

Open = Available & accommodating
Having a back up if needed
Responsive/timely
Treat them as a priority
Exhibit respect
Offer additional information or sources
Make it easy
What they’re after...

• Value and relevance to THEIR audience
• Timeliness
• Immediacy
• Effect/importance
• Drama
• Originality
• Hook!
What’s in a hook?

• Opening a new service line
• Quick health tips and “news you can use”
• Successful case studies
• Stellar faculty, staff
• Collaborations
• Opening of new facilities
• Original research, findings
• Tying offering into a national trend
• A new product
• Simplifying an old way of doing something
• Great patient testimonials
Their objective? INFORM

Who cares?
How many people will this affect?
What’s in it for the reader, viewer or listener?

To determine if a story is newsworthy, ask yourself...

– Is this timely? Events that happened last week could be old news.
– Is it original? An improvement on an existing service is good, too.
– Is it unusual? What makes this product/service stand apart from its competitors?
– Will this affect the medium’s readers, listeners or viewers? Why should they care?
– Does this announcement have a positive impact on the local economy?
– Can we tie this product, service or expert to something already getting coverage in the news? For example, we could have one of our experts discuss Phase II clinical trial treatment options for a disease that a celebrity recently announced he or she has.
– Does this tie into a bigger trend? Is the nation doing something to improve the public’s health, and MUSC is the first teaching hospital in the state to join the trend?
– Does it have emotional appeal? Patient testimonials are great to pair with a service or practice.
You’ve got a story, now what?

Suggest a story
http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/pr/

Media protocols
http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/pr/forfacultyandstaff/
Interviewing

If I could write the story, what would I want the focus to be?

No more than three key messages.

Each message should be no longer than 2 or 3 sentences
  – Should be about 15-30 seconds when spoken
  – Easy to understand and memorize

Answer the question, “What’s in it for me?” from an audience standpoint
• Supporting information (facts, stats, anecdotes, metaphors/analogies, third party endorsement)

• Be REAL

• Anticipate questions- the hard ones, too

• Research the reporter ahead of time

• Avoid spur of the moment; even if you call them back just 15 minutes later
• Home team advantage
• Dress professionally, not uncomfortably
• Decide if you want to tape the interview
• Plan YOUR agenda
• Posture, tone, emphasis, volume, gestures, eye contact

Changing What’s Possible

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• Pause before you answer

• Keep answers short (edit yourself before they edit you)

• Don’t speculate; ok to say you don’t know/ you’ll look into it OR ask them to clarify because you aren’t clear on its bearing to the interview topic

• Specific techniques:
  – make points early
  – count down
  – flagging
  – bridging
  – avoiding jargon/acronyms,
  – use vivid examples
  – simplify stats
  – don’t repeat misleading/inaccurate information
  – show compassion
  – maintain eye contact
  – TELL THE TRUTH
And finally, if you remember nothing else from today... there is no such thing as “off the record!”
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