

# 9 Sharing the Message: Working with the Media and TB Stakeholders

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The media are highly influential. They can use their influence to enhance your public image while building support for your TB prevention and control efforts. The media can also be sensationalistic, circulate inaccurate and incomplete information, and use their influence in ways that may damage your image and limit your outcomes. This chapter provides tips and strategies designed to help you and your partnership work productively with the media.

During the process of updating this guide, it became clear that there are conflicting views among TB controllers and program staff about the value of working with the media. Some felt that media coverage is always negative and should be avoided at all costs. This perception has caused some public health agencies to discourage or prohibit their TB programs from working with the media.

Yet, other TB controllers and programs stated that developing positive relationships with media professionals is an essential component of effective TB prevention and control efforts. These controllers and program staff noted that working effectively with the media on TB issues requires

- Most importantly, being proactive and consistently working with respected media before a crisis occurs (for recommendations on working with the media during a TB outbreak, see Chapter 10: *Preparing Your Partnership to Communicate During a TB Outbreak*)
- Recognizing that the media are very diverse, and include both good journalists and sensationalistic journalists
- Addressing the sensitive nature of working with public media; of particular importance is promoting TB awareness without promoting backlashes and prejudice against high-risk populations

#### Things to Keep In Mind

Even when you have excellent relationships with your media outlets, trying to involve them as participants in your general TB partnership meetings may be counterproductive. Media presence may limit discussions of delicate issues.

These TB controllers and program staff strongly urge their colleagues to initiate and build strong working relationships with good journalists. If your agency currently discourages or prohibits working with the media, you will need to clarify with your agency's key decision makers how this position will impact the work of your partnership. You may wish to explore with these decision makers the potential for negative

consequences (misinformation, panic, anger, and mistrust) when media contact is limited to times of crisis.

## Common Formats for Accessing the Media

This section covers several common formats for accessing the media:

- Meeting with editorial boards
- Press briefings
- Press conferences
- Media advisories
- Press releases
- Public service announcements (PSA)
- Feature stories
- Op-Ed pieces
- Letters to the editor
- Public access TV stations
- Media interviews (television, radio, and print media)

### ***Meetings with Editorial Boards***

Requesting a meeting with the editorial board of a newspaper or magazine is appropriate when you are trying to:

- Have the newspaper or magazine establish or change its position on a public policy issue, such as DOT (directly observed therapy) (see Chapter 12: *Selling Your Success to Others*)
- Have the newspaper or magazine increase or change the content of its TB coverage

Before meeting with an editorial board, it is important to do your homework:

- Review the newspaper or magazine's previous coverage of TB and its perspective on public health issues. Use this information to develop an effective approach for communicating with the board. (See **Social Marketing with TB Stakeholders** at the end of this chapter.)
- Work with partners to gather data and create a brief (15 to 20 minute) compelling argument for supporting your TB issue (see Chapter 12: *Selling Your Success to Others*). Your argument should clearly state the importance of this issue to the magazine or paper's target audience.
- Work with two to four credible, expert (e.g., medical, scientific, and at-risk populations) partners who will attend the editorial board meeting and make the presentation.
- Anticipate and prepare for questions.

## **Press Briefings**

Press briefings can establish positive relationships with journalists while providing them with important background information on TB, such as symptoms, cost-effectiveness of prevention, and information that supports a desired policy change. Since journalists must cover a wide variety of topics, a well-run press briefing is an efficient way for them to do their TB homework. Press briefings might be organized to coincide with World TB Day, or with proposed changes in TB policies or treatment protocols.

When organizing a press briefing, it is important to

- Invite journalists, including columnists, who regularly cover health or social issues from influential print and broadcast media, including those whose target audiences are at-risk populations.
- If possible, work with a trusted media colleague who can provide guidance on the best location and time of day for the briefing, as well as how best to market the briefing to influential reporters.
- If possible, make the meeting more appealing by providing food, such as a continental breakfast.
- Work with partners to identify and prepare written materials for participating journalists, such as fact sheets on TB in your area and the history and work of the partnership.
- Prepare a 25- to 35-minute briefing made by those with appropriate areas of expertise, followed by time for questions.
- Prepare speakers in advance to anticipate questions and answers and to ensure that you speak with one voice.
- Start and end on time. Journalists have tight publication deadlines. You lose credibility when you are unable to keep to your schedule.
- Have a skilled moderator to ensure the briefing keeps on topic and on schedule, as well as to encourage questions.
- Be available immediately following the briefing for radio, TV, or print journalists who may wish to conduct brief individual interviews.

## **Press Conferences**

Conducting a press conference is appropriate when you have national or international TB experts or celebrities visiting your area, to break important news, such as the release of your program area's annual TB statistics, or to address a TB outbreak in your area. When the press conference is used to break important news,

do not succumb to individual journalists' requests for advance access to your news. Appearing to play favorites will damage your relationships with other journalists.

### **Media Advisories**

Media advisories are written announcements of your press briefings, press conferences, and public events that are sent to the media you hope will attend.

### **Press Releases**

Press releases contain breaking news that media outlets can develop into print and broadcast news stories. Many media outlets receive large quantities of press releases daily, so you are facing stiff competition for media attention. An eye-catching headline and compelling first paragraph are essential to being noticed. A trusted relationship with the media (i.e., they see you as reliable and credible) will greatly increase your chances of receiving coverage.

A good TB press release communicates objectively about breaking news and provides background information.

Opinions can be expressed using

quotes from credible sources. The press release also lists one or two knowledgeable contact people who are prepared to provide additional information. Make sure these contacts are easy to reach during normal business hours.

### **Public Service Announcements**

A public service announcement (PSA) is an advertisement that a mass media outlet (e.g., magazine, newspaper, radio station, television station, website, and outdoor venue) prints or broadcasts free of charge. A PSA can be used to spread the word about public events, such as health fairs, or to raise awareness about a particular issue.

#### **Press Release: Tuberculosis – New Approach to an Old Foe**

On March 27, 2003, the United States Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, and the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission hosted a World TB Day Observance—No TB on *Our Borders: Now Is the Time!*—in El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico.

This bilingual, bi-national event, attended by over 150 public health professionals, researchers, physicians, and government officials from the United States and Mexico, highlighted the success of two countries working together to fight TB and promote health. Forty-two U.S. and Mexican governmental and nongovernmental organizations and international organizations collaborated in the planning of this event. The event showcased the new United States-Mexico Bi-national TB Referral and Case Management Project.

This project will establish a comprehensive bi-national TB referral and case management system for the United States and Mexico. The project builds upon the previous extensive bi-national referral experience of San Diego County Health and Human Services' CureTB Program, the Migrant Clinician Network's TBNET program, and other CDC-sponsored bi-national TB projects.

If your area has media outlets serving your high-risk populations, a PSA could be an effective way to communicate TB risk factors and symptoms, and the locations of service providers. Media outlets will provide you with their PSA requirements upon request.

### **Feature Stories**

Feature stories provide in-depth information, often from a human-interest perspective. For example, you may wish to profile a specific patient (with the patient's permission). These stories are usually negotiated with a single media outlet. They can promote a positive image of your agency and the TB partnership.

### **Op-Ed Pieces**

Opposite-Editorial (Op-Ed) pieces are opportunities to write an editorial for publication. Op-Ed pieces are usually limited to about 800 words in length. A simple phone call to a media outlet can provide you with its Op-Ed guidelines. Op-Ed pieces usually appear on the editorial pages with their own headlines and bylines. They can be effective ways to raise support and awareness of TB issues. In a setting of controversy, they can also facilitate needed policy changes by providing expert opinion based on data. Having a prominent, credible author or authors helps.

### **Letters to the Editor**

Newspapers and magazines usually dedicate space to letters expressing readers' viewpoints about the publication's content and editorial positions. Letters to the editor are often widely read.

They are most effective when they are brief and limited to one or two key points. It is important to note that most print media reserve the right to edit (for length) letters they publish.

#### **Things to Keep In Mind When Working With the Media**

- It is important to clarify in advance when and how designated partners will speak on behalf of the partnership. This clarification should not attempt to limit individual partners from working with the media as representatives of their own organizations.
- Monitor or track media coverage of TB and health-related issues over time. Monitoring coverage allows you to identify trends associated with quantity, prominence, slant (positive or negative), accuracy, and type of story.
- Personal contact with reporters is important. A simple e-mail thanking a reporter for effective coverage of a health issue can open the door to a good working relationship with that reporter. Similarly, a respectful note offering additional information on a topic or pointing out an inaccuracy may cause the journalist to seek your input in the future.
- Some areas have publications that list media outlets and their journalists, including contact information and areas of interest. One of your partners, or a media outlet, may be able to tell you whether this resource exists in your area.
- Journalists are very busy. Always be concise in your dealings with them and be considerate of their deadlines.

## **Public Access TV Stations**

Some public health agencies have regularly scheduled weekly programs on their local public access television stations. These programs provide access to the general public. Videotapes of programs presented can be used as longer-term educational tools. Though access is free, ensuring your program is interesting and informative and does not create fear or distrust of high-risk populations can be challenging.

## **Media Interviews (Television, Radio, and Print Media)**

Media interviews can occur in a variety of settings. They may involve talk-show formats, brief sound bites used by broadcast journalists, or extensive interviews for print media features. The Center for the Advancement of Health's publication, *Communicating Health Behavior Sciences in the Media: Tips for Researchers*, has excellent tips for preparing for and conducting interviews (for more information about that publication, see **Related Resources** at the end of this chapter).

## **Checklist for Conducting a Press Conference**

### **Articulate a Compelling Reason for the Press Conference**

Compelling reasons include:

- A newsworthy story or breaking TB information with significant impact on your program area
- The TB partnership is launching a major new program or policy initiative, or is issuing a public statement about a “controversial” issue
- Key messages and information to be imparted

### **Checklist for Conducting a Press Conference**

- Articulate a compelling reason for the press conference
- Identify, recruit, and prepare press conference speakers
- Assemble the necessary materials
- Ensure that journalists attend
- Follow up and follow through

### **Identify, Recruit, and Prepare Press Conference Speakers**

- Identify and gain firm commitments from articulate, credible speakers who will stick to the agreed-upon messages and the time they are allotted.
- Work with speakers to ensure that all necessary information is presented in a concise and compelling fashion with little or no repetition among speakers. It is helpful to have each speaker make and reinforce one or two key points (see the *Single Overriding Communications Objective (SOCO) Worksheet* in Chapter 16: *Toolkit*).
- Have speakers use visuals to support their presentations (e.g., slide set presentations, overheads, and handouts).

- Work with speakers to anticipate and prepare answers to tough questions.
- Identify and gain a firm commitment from a skilled moderator who will keep time. The moderator’s job also includes encouraging questions while ensuring that the press conference stays focused on your issue and messages.
- Make sure speakers avoid technical jargons and acronyms that are unfamiliar to journalists.
- Identify one or two easily reachable contact people who will be able to answer logistical questions in advance of the conference.

### ***Assemble the Necessary Materials***

- A sign-up sheet that each attending journalist is asked to sign with their name, organization, e-mail, fax, phone and address
- A press kit that includes:
  - The agenda for your press conference
  - Your press release or media advisory
  - A list of the press conference speakers and moderator, including brief biographies that emphasize their credentials
  - Fact sheets, graphs, a concise background on TB in your area, and concise information on your partnership’s history, purpose and major accomplishments
  - Executive summaries and full copies of any reports issued at the press conference
  - Whenever possible, written copies of speakers’ presentations or at least their key points (giving written copies to the media helps to avoid misquotes and misinformation)
- Good visuals, which include:
  - TB posters or banners
  - Displays that include pictures of the partnership and its work

### ***Ensure Journalists Attend***

- Regularly monitor TB and health coverage in your area so you know which journalists have health care or social issues as their “beat” and how they are covering it. When you cannot access this information, call media outlets directly to ask them who should be invited from their organization. Some media outlets prefer all press releases be sent to an assignment editor, who makes decisions about which journalist will cover which stories. This preference should be honored. However, even in these cases, it is still usually helpful to send individual press releases directly to reporters who have covered health issues in the past.

- Send press releases to the journalists and assignment editors (e-mails are inexpensive and convenient) approximately 10 days prior to the press conference, unless this is a breaking news story that requires a press conference on one or two days notice to minimize misinformation and public confusion.
- Contact journalists and assignment editors to make certain they received the press release, answer any questions they may have, and get a sense of their interest in attending. It is helpful to have the partners with positive media relationships to make the follow-up contact with the individuals they know.
- One or two days before the press conference, send a reminder to journalists and assignment editors of the conference date, time, and topic.

### ***Follow Up and Follow Through***

- Immediately following the press conference, review the list of journalists who attended. When an influential media outlet or a key journalist fails to attend, send them a copy of your press kit (electronically, if possible). They may use this information to cover the event.
- Monitor all media outlets and document the coverage of the event. Retain copies of print coverage and, whenever possible, copies of radio and TV coverage. Positive coverage can come in handy in the future (see Chapter 12: *Selling Your Success to Others*).
- Send a thank you letter or e-mail to reporters who provide accurate coverage of your event. People tend to complain about inaccuracies, but rarely acknowledge accurate (i.e., positive) coverage. Thus, a timely thank you is likely to have a big impact.
- If any coverage was negative or major outlets failed to cover the event, consider writing an Op-Ed piece or meeting with appropriate editorial boards or journalists to make a case for improved coverage.

## **Social Marketing with TB Stakeholders**

Social marketing is defined as “an organization’s task to determine the wants, needs, and interests of target audiences (markets), and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively in ways that preserve or enhance the consumer’s and society’s well being.”<sup>55</sup> When we talk about reaching and involving TB stakeholders in productive partnerships, we are, in essence, talking about social marketing. Thus, much of this guide addresses social marketing issues.

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<sup>55</sup>Kotler P. 1975. *Marketing for Non-profit Organizations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Social marketing helps you to develop the right message for delivery:

- By the right messengers
- Through the most appropriate channels
- To the right audience
- At the right time

By helping you develop appropriate messages, social marketing helps you promote a desired concept or product in a way that has outcomes that are evaluated and that can improve (appropriately change) systems and practices.

Partnerships with a diverse mix of dedicated stakeholders are in a very good position to use the breadth of their combined knowledge to create and implement highly successful social marketing strategies.

## Related Resources

- *American Public Health Association Media Advocacy Manual*

This 14-page publication serves as a “how to” for working with the media and includes a guide to planning your message. It is available free of charge at [www.apha.org/news/Media\\_Advocacy\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.apha.org/news/Media_Advocacy_Manual.pdf).

- *Communicating Health Behavior Sciences in the Media: Tips for Researchers*

This eight-page pamphlet from the Center for the Advancement of Health (2001) provides tips for getting the media’s attention, writing press releases, preparing for and conducting interviews and being effective on television. It is available free of charge at [www.cfah.org/pdfs/ResearchTipsBooklet.pdf](http://www.cfah.org/pdfs/ResearchTipsBooklet.pdf).

- *Introduction to Media Relations* (1992)

This VHS training video is designed to teach public health officials to effectively communicate and interact with the print and electronic media. Bob Howard, Office of Public Affairs, and Carol Robinson, Office of the Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, served as course developers. Running Time: 38 minutes. Target Audience: Academicians, Community Leaders, Health Officers, Program Managers, and Public Health Program Staff. Price: \$30.00. This training video may be ordered online at [www2.cdc.gov/PHTN/catalog/vt007.asp](http://www2.cdc.gov/PHTN/catalog/vt007.asp).

- *Making Health Communication Programs Work* (2003)

This 250-page publication contains a chapter entitled *Assessing effectiveness and making refinements*, which addresses designing and using effective outcome evaluations. This publication is available through the National Cancer Institute’s Website at [www.cancer.gov/pinkbook](http://www.cancer.gov/pinkbook) or by calling 1-800-422-6237.