Working with the media: What to do, what not to do

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Why talk to the media?

- Your funder wants you to
Publicizing the outcomes of NIH-funded projects and communicating the role of NIH support in biomedical research improves public understanding of how we, the biomedical research community as a whole, are working to improve human health.

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● Your school wants you to
3. Service

Service includes professional and administrative activity within the institution, to the candidate’s profession, and to the public. Service on medical school or university committees, on committees of scientific societies, to granting agencies and scholarly journals, *public relations activities on behalf of the University*, and other administrative assignments can be used to demonstrate commitments to service. Professional service to the community at local, state, regional, national or international levels shall also be recognized. The definition of service for determining promotion and tenure also includes excellence in clinical activities and development and responsibility for shared scientific resources.

**Why talk to the media?**

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- Your school wants you to
- Your mother (father, spouse, kids, etc...) want you to
Why talk to the media?

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- Your school wants you to
- Your mother (father, spouse, kids, etc...) want you to
- It’s the right thing to do
SHOULD I TALK TO THEM?

- Who do you work for?
- Who will actually interview me?
SHOULD I TALK TO THEM?

- Who do you work for?
- Who will actually interview me?

- Why do you want to talk to me? Who else are you speaking with?
- What kind of story are you working on?
- How much do you know about this already? What do you need to learn?
- How would we talk? (In person, email, phone)
- When do you need to talk? (Deadline)
SHOULD I TALK TO THEM?

Ask yourself:

- Can I provide the information this person needs? Would someone else be better?
- Will talking with them help someone? (Probably so)
- Do I have enough time to give them the education and information they need?

- Do I want to?
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● Do I want to?
● Can I do this by myself? Should I do this by myself?

OHSU News & Communications: (503) 494-8231
http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/news_events/for-media/contacts.cfm

"All grantees must acknowledge Federal funding when issuing statements, press releases, requests for proposals, bid invitations, and other documents describing projects or programs funded in whole or in part with Federal money. Each publication, press release, or other document about research supported by an NIH grant must include:

1) An acknowledgment of NIH grant support such as:
   "Research reported in this [publication, release] was supported by [name of the Institute, Center, or other funding component] of the National Institutes of Health under grant number [specific NIH grant number in this format: R01GM012345]."

2) A disclaimer that says:
   "The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health."

If the grantee plans to issue a press release about research supported by an NIH grant, it should notify the NIH funding component in advance to allow for coordination. See www.nih.gov/news/media_contacts.htm for media contact information."


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NIH encourages grantees who have used or generated HeLa whole genome sequence data that is under controlled access in dbGaP to acknowledge Henrietta Lacks and her family by using this sample language (or something similar) in their publications, presentations, or other public reporting of research using these genomic data:

“The genome sequence described/used in this research was derived from a HeLa cell line. Henrietta Lacks, and the HeLa cell line that was established from her tumor cells without her knowledge or consent in 1951, have made significant contributions to scientific progress and advances in human health. We are grateful to Henrietta Lacks, now deceased, and to her surviving family members for their contributions to biomedical research. This study was reviewed by the NIH HeLa Genome Data Access Working Group (http://acd.od.nih.gov/hlgda.htm). The genomic datasets used for analysis described in this manuscript were obtained from the database of Genotypes and Phenotypes (dbGaP) through dbGaP accession number phs000640.v1.p1.”
How to talk to reporters

- Be clear
  - Even if the reporter knows much, he or she must explain to a general audience

- "I couldn't reduce it to the freshman level. That means we don't really understand it." - Richard Feynman to colleague David Goodstein, on why spin 1/2 particles obey Fermi-Dirac statistics.
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  - “Dr. Hoenikker used to say that any scientist who couldn't explain to an eight-year-old what he was doing was a charlatan.” - Kurt Vonnegut, Cat’s Cradle

• Speak like you’re talking to your mother
How to talk to reporters

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  *Speak like you’re talking to mom*
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- Ask if they understood or need more explanation, especially about technical issues
- “What questions do you have?”
- Offer to talk more later, if you can

Audio & video

- Think about the sound and images in the background
- Think about what you want to wear
- Provide pictures, charts or other illustrations
- Know that TV news likely will include less information and less nuance
- Seriously consider asking News & Communications for help, especially with TV
Rules

- **Anything you say** may end up in print or on the air.
  - This includes small talk before or after you think the interview has started, emails you send before and after, offhand remarks, jokes, etc.
- "Off the record" comments must be negotiated in advance, and only with reporters you trust.

- No, you can’t see the story in advance (most likely).
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- Editors exist. Therefore, reporters don’t fully control the final timing, placement or content of their work.

FEARS

- **They’ll get it all wrong**
  - Most likely fear to come true
  - Be as clear, simple and accurate as possible
  - Think of the few main points you want to get across, and practice explaining them simply in advance
  - Consider an email interview, or send a separate email explaining complex topics that a reporter can refer to
FEARS

- They’ll get it all wrong
- **Gotcha journalism**
  - Rarely happens
  - More likely with certain reporters or outlets
  - More likely with certain topics (anything very political or publicly controversial, e.g. cloning)

![Image of a man in a tunnel]

FEARS

- They’ll get it all wrong
- **Gotcha journalism**
- **Misquoting**
  - Rarely happens, though you won’t believe me

- “I really didn’t say everything I said.” - Yogi Berra
FEARS
● They’ll get it all wrong
● Gotcha journalism
● Misquoting
● How will I look/sound/seem?

IF IT’S BAD
● Don’t worry about minor mistakes. If it’s mostly right, you’ve done a public service

  • Call the reporter first
  • If that doesn’t work, ask to speak to the editor

  • If it’s a significant factual error, ask for a correction. Be prepared to show the accurate information

  • Ask if you can write a letter or op-ed explaining your concerns or interpretation

  • Consult News & Communications for advice or help
What questions do you have?
What questions do you have?