

Media Relations Guide



This section will assist you in dealing with the media, interviewing, and preparing press releases and letters to the editor. This section will guide you in creating a successful media relations strategy, and help you find media relations less intimidating.

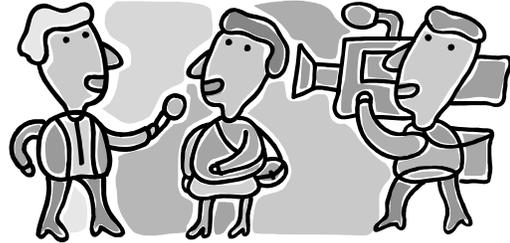
Ground Rules for a Successful Media Relations Strategy

Before you agree to an interview or initiate a call to the media, you may want to touch base with RNAO's Director of Communications and review what you plan to say. This will help keep our message consistent across the province.

While many feel apprehensive about dealing with the media, it isn't that difficult. Remember, they have questions concerning your area of expertise. Reporters have one main interest: getting an interesting and accurate story. Keep in mind, however, that they may have different definitions than you do of what is interesting, and even what is accurate!

Guidelines for Successful Interviews

- Make it clear from the outset whether you're speaking for yourself or on behalf of your Chapter, your Interest Group, or the association. Provide the reporter with your name and title that relates to the organization that you are representing - for example, your name and position within RNAO.
- A media interview does not follow a conversational format. Present your main points and conclusions first. This introduces the reporter to the ideas or messages you wish to present, and will help focus the interview. If you are presenting complex information, sum up at the end of the interview.
- Take the time to collect your thoughts before agreeing to an interview. It is quite acceptable to question a reporter about the story s/he is working on, who else s/he is speaking with, and what s/he wants to know before agreeing to an interview. If necessary, tell the reporter you would like to consider her/his invitation and get back to her/him in within an agreed-upon time period.
- Decide in advance what you want to say. Making a few rough notes beforehand will help jog your memory during the interview, but avoid writing out an entire script - it will sound like you are "reading" into the phone. Focus on three or four key points or messages only. When



deciding on these points, ask yourself what parts of your story are the most interesting. Think of it in terms of what would make the “headlines”.

- Use one or two examples to explain your position, rather than citing a reference list of supporting facts. ***Sacrifice comprehensiveness for simplicity and force.*** After all, the average length of a newspaper story is about 400 words, while radio or television reports can be as brief as 30 seconds.
- Don't say: “Please don't print this” or “This is off-the-record”. If you don't want something to be printed, don't say it. For a reporter, there is no such thing as “off-the-record”.
- If the reporter asks a question that you really don't wish to answer, say so and stand by your decision. However, be prepared for the reporter to press you on the point from several different angles and at different times during the discussion. You can always deflect questions by referring the reporter to RNAO's Director of Communications.
- Try to avoid using nursing jargon. Technical language will be translated by the reporter, and you may not be pleased with the translation. ***Be factual, descriptive and straightforward.*** The best approach is to say it simply and directly. Remember your key messages!
- Be prepared to leave a name and phone number as a contact. It may not be your own, but the reporter will need someone to call to get

further details or to clarify any confusion.

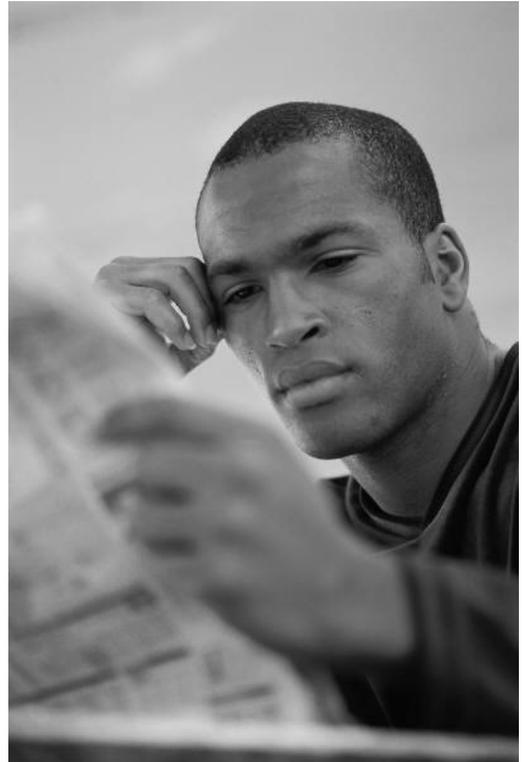
- Why not call a reporter and say, “Thank you”? Reporters need encouragement too. Be sure to tell them you’d like to help in the future. If you become a “contact” for someone in the media, you’ll be asked again to give your opinion and advice.
- Be confident. You are qualified to act as a source of information on your health-care field, and you can be of great assistance to the reporter by sharing your knowledge and expertise.



Guidelines for a Successful News Release

Reporters may be aware of current issues in health care, but they need to know that registered nurses can help them understand the issues. One way you can get your message out is by issuing a news release. Newspapers like *The Toronto Star*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *London Free Press* will reach the largest audience, but it's also important to target your community newspaper or local radio and TV stations.

What kind of items appeal to the media? Usually a story is newsworthy if it involves the following key elements.



Key Elements

→The first, and most important, is people. News is about people, what they do, how they do it, who they do it to, and how something will affect them.

→News must also answer most, if not all, of the five Ws and H – **What, Where, When, Why, Who and How.**

→News must focus on an issue that the general public is interested in and might have an effect on them. ***Health care has been judged as the second-leading news interest category in most communities.***

→News should also be timely and, if possible, tied into or related to an event already in the news.

Preparing a News Release

- Use letterhead, for example your Chapter letterhead. News releases should contain the organization's name, phone number and fax number.
- Always type a news release. Do not use italics or bold type in the news release, and do not underline sections.
- The release should end with a contact name and phone number to call if more information is required.
- Type the date of issue on each release. This is not necessarily the same as the date on which it was produced, but the date that the information can be made public.
- Releases should be double-spaced.
- Keep the paragraphs short -- one or two sentences each.
- Keep it to one page if possible. If it must be longer, never split a paragraph or sentence over two pages. Type "more" at the bottom of each page, except the last one.
- Leave lots of white space on the page, and use wide margins. (This gives the editors and reporters space to add information.)
- Always give full names, titles and affiliations of the people you mention.
- Avoid using clichés, and omit complicated material. Remember, if you must, sacrifice comprehensiveness for simplicity and force.
- Reporters quote people, not just the association. Reporters want live quotes that clarify, summarize, and put complex issues into simple terms. It is the quotes that bring your news release alive.
- At the end of the release, type "-30-" and then proceed with the contact information.

Who do you send it to?

That depends on who you want to get your message. If you're focusing on the print media, you could send it to dailies, community (weekly) newspapers, specialty publications, or a combination of these. For electronic media, select radio and TV stations with programs, news anchors, hosts, or producers who are most likely to run your story, or that have already shown an interest in health care.

It is often easier to get interest from smaller media outlets because they do not have the resources to produce their own original material. Constrained by limited time and staff resources, these outlets rely heavily on the work of outside groups. The competition for airtime or column inches is therefore not as fierce.

Check newspapers, radio and TV regularly to identify persons who show an interest in your type of issues. You can then contact them and introduce yourself as a reliable information resource. Keep track of these contacts, which will form the basis of your media contact lists.

The RNAO Communications Department has an up-to-date directory of Ontario media contacts. Upon request, they can provide a list of media with phone/fax numbers and names of key personnel.

The following page is an example of a news release sent out by RNAO in 2006.



MEDIA ADVISORY: Local RNs host all-candidates debate in Kitchener Centre

TORONTO, Jan. 13, 2006 – As the date for the federal election nears, registered nurses in Kitchener are helping voters to get informed on issues that matter to them, especially health care, which Canadians consistently rate as their number one issue of concern. This Saturday, members of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario's (RNAO) Waterloo chapter are hosting an all candidates' debate on health-care issues for the riding of Kitchener Centre.

“Voters have a right to know where their candidates stand on the issues, whether it's wait times, timely access to health professionals or the protection and strengthening of Medicare,” says RNAO's executive director Doris Grinspun. “In an election campaign that has been dominated by talk of government ethics and corruption, it is doubly important that health care is not lost in the shuffle. Canadians deserve to know who will defend their not-for-profit health care system – and who will dismantle it.”

In a discussion moderated by David Docherty, professor of political science and dean of arts at Wilfrid Laurier University, candidates from four parties will debate issues and take questions from the audience, primarily about topics related to health care.

WHO:

- Candidates for Kitchener Centre, including Karen Redman (Liberal), Richard Walsh Bowers (New Democratic Party), Steven Cage (Conservative Party of Canada), and Tony Maas (Green Party).
- Panel moderated by David Docherty, professor of political science and dean of arts at Wilfrid Laurier University.
- Suzy Young, RN. President of RNAO's Waterloo chapter.

WHAT: All-candidates meeting to debate health care for the riding of Kitchener Centre.

WHERE: Kitchener Public Library auditorium, 85 Queen Street North, Kitchener.

WHEN: Saturday, Jan. 14, 2006 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario is the professional association representing registered nurses wherever they practise in Ontario. Since 1925, RNAO has lobbied for healthy public policy, promoted excellence in nursing practice, increased nurses' contribution to shaping the health-care system, and influenced decisions that affect nurses and the public they serve.

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For more information:

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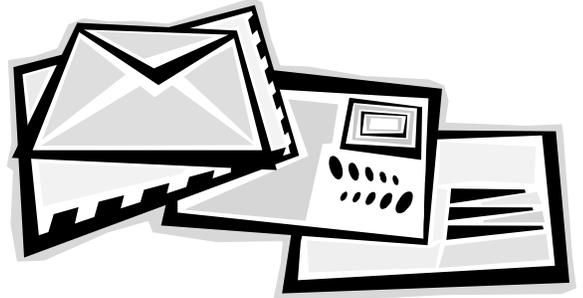
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Taking Action!

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario 2006

Letters to the Editor

- The “Letters to the Editor” section of the newspapers has a very high readership. This section is often monitored by politicians and other decision-makers to gauge public opinion.
- If you haven’t written such a letter before, study the style of letters printed in your target newspaper or magazine. This will give you an idea of the appropriate style, approach and format to use.
- Don’t try to cover a broad subject in one letter. Deal with only one topic, and focus on one major message.
- How long should your letter be? No more than 300 - 350 words.
- The tone of the letter is important. Strive for a straightforward, factual approach.
- Begin the letter by referring to the issue (or title and date of publication) in which the item or article to which you are responding was published.
- Don’t send out a letter in the heat of the moment. Instead, let your letter sit overnight and then take a second, sober look. This can save you embarrassment if your letter was overly emotional, or contained sweeping statements. It also gives you a second chance to check your facts, improve your approach and polish your prose.
- On the other hand, timeliness is crucial. For example, if you are writing to a daily newspaper, submit your letter within 48 hours or the topic gets stale. Consider faxing your letter to ensure a quick delivery.



- If you are modelling your letter on one submitted by RNAO, try to rewrite the major points in your own words. An original letter has far more impact than a number of letters written in the exactly same way.
- Be sure to include your name and phone number. Once it is being considered for publication, most newspapers will call to check that you actually sent the letter.
- A signed letter is certainly more powerful. A paper will not print an unsigned letter, and rarely print a letter whose author has requested anonymity. If you are signing the letter as a member of RNAO, or as a member of your Chapter/Regional executive, please have RNAO's Director of Communications review your letter before sending it out.

Media relations are fun! The media is your voice to the public. Help them understand the issues.