

Speaking Out: RNAO's Media Relations Strategy Guide

This guide will assist you in dealing with the media and preparing news releases and letters to the editor. It will also help you create a successful media relations strategy, and help make your experience dealing with reporters less intimidating.

This guide was written by RNAO's Communications department, the original file can be found online here: https://myrnao.ca/sites/myrnao.ca/files/related-documents/Media_Relations_Toolkit.pdf

Ground rules for a successful media relations strategy

The first thing you need to know is that you have a story to tell and can speak from credible experience. Nurses consistently are ranked among the most trusted professionals. You also work in an important area: health care affects everyone.

Some people feel apprehensive about dealing with the media, but it shouldn't be an intimidating experience. Remember: reporters have questions concerning your area of expertise.

Before you agree to an interview or initiate a call to the media, you may want to touch base with a member of RNAO's communications department, and review what you plan to say. This will help keep the association's message consistent.

Remember: reporters have deadlines, so don't miss an opportunity to speak to the media when it presents itself.

If you need assistance you can contact RNAO and ask to speak with someone in the communications department who deals with media enquiries.

Through the media, you reach the public in a way that no other medium can. It's a way to share the expertise that nurses have, and to speak out on issues that affect nurses and the people we care for.

(RNAO's Chief Executive Officer, Doris Grinspun)

Touching base with reporters

If you live in a large community, chances are your local newspaper has a reporter dedicated to the health beat. If so, find out who that is and establish contact. If you live in smaller city or town, get to know the editor in chief, or a general assignment reporter. The same is true of reporters who work for the local radio or television station.

Introduce yourself and let reporters know you can help them (this is especially true if you are a chapter or regional president, an interest group chair or a policy or communications officer). Establishing contact is a great way to make the media aware that a nurse is just a phone call or email away. It also makes people aware of the priorities of the association and the issues affecting your community

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 a title that relates to the organization that you are representing. Example: I'm Doris Grinspun, Chief Executive Officer of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

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 your main points 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 within an agreed upon time.

Decide in advance what you want to say. Making a few rough notes beforehand will help jog your memory during the interview. Avoid writing out an entire script – it will sound like you are lecturing.

Focus on three or four key points or messages only; 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.



There is no such thing as "off-the-record." 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.

A reporter may feel inclined to steer the conversation in a different direction. If you have key points to present, remember to present them at the beginning of the interview. Questions will probably crop up during this time, but remember to stay on track.

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 result. 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, email, and phone number as contact information. The reporter will need someone to call to get further details or to clarify any confusion. The reporter may also call on your expertise in the future for another story.

After the story is published or broadcast, call the reporter to 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 or source 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 about your area of expertise in the health-care field, and you can be of great assistance to the reporter by sharing your knowledge.

What kind of items appeal to the media?

Usually a story is newsworthy if it involves the following key elements:

- 1) People. News is about people, what they do, how they do it, who they do it to, and how something will affect them. Health care affects people. Always keep your patients in mind when thinking of examples. We’re not asking you to divulge personal information about the people you care for, but you can share your experiences. After all: anecdotes breathe life into a story.
- 2) Answer most, if not all, of the five Ws and H – What, Where, When, Why, Who and How.
- 3) Focus on an issue that the general public is interested in, or a topic that might have an effect on them. Health care always ranks as a leading news interest category in most communities. Be timely and, if possible, tie your story to an event already in the news.

Media advisories and media releases

Reporters may be aware of current issues in health care, but they need to know that registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students can help them understand the issues. One way you can get your message out is by writing a media advisory or media release to send to reporters.

Media Advisory	Media Release
<p>The goal of sending out the advisory is to have members of the media attend the event you are holding to gather more information, conduct interviews, and prepare stories for radio, television and newspapers.</p> <p>Media advisories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outline the schedule or details of a time-sensitive event that your group is hosting • informs journalists of 'who, what, when, where, and why' • are usually not more than a page long 	<p>While media releases will sometimes be printed in newspapers or online publications as they are written, they generally provide background information for a story or interview.</p> <p>Media releases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe an organization's position on an issue, reaction to an event, or announcement of a new program. • should include a quote from a spokesperson (a chapter president or interest group chair, for example)

Newspapers such as the Globe and Mail, 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.

Preparing a media advisory or release

Keep the paragraphs short – one or two sentences each.

Keep the advisory 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, to let the reader know there is more content to come.

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 or jargon, and omit complicated material.

Reporters quote people, not just the association. They want quotes that clarify, summarize, and put complex issues into simple terms. Quotes bring your news release alive.

Type the date and city in which the advisory is released. This is not necessarily the same as the date on which it was produced, but the date that the information can be made public.

At the end of the advisory or release, type "-30-" and then proceed with the organization or individual's name, phone number and email address.

Who do you send it to?

That depends on who you want to receive your message.

If you're focusing on print media, you could send it to dailies, community (weekly) newspapers, specialty publications, or a combination of these.

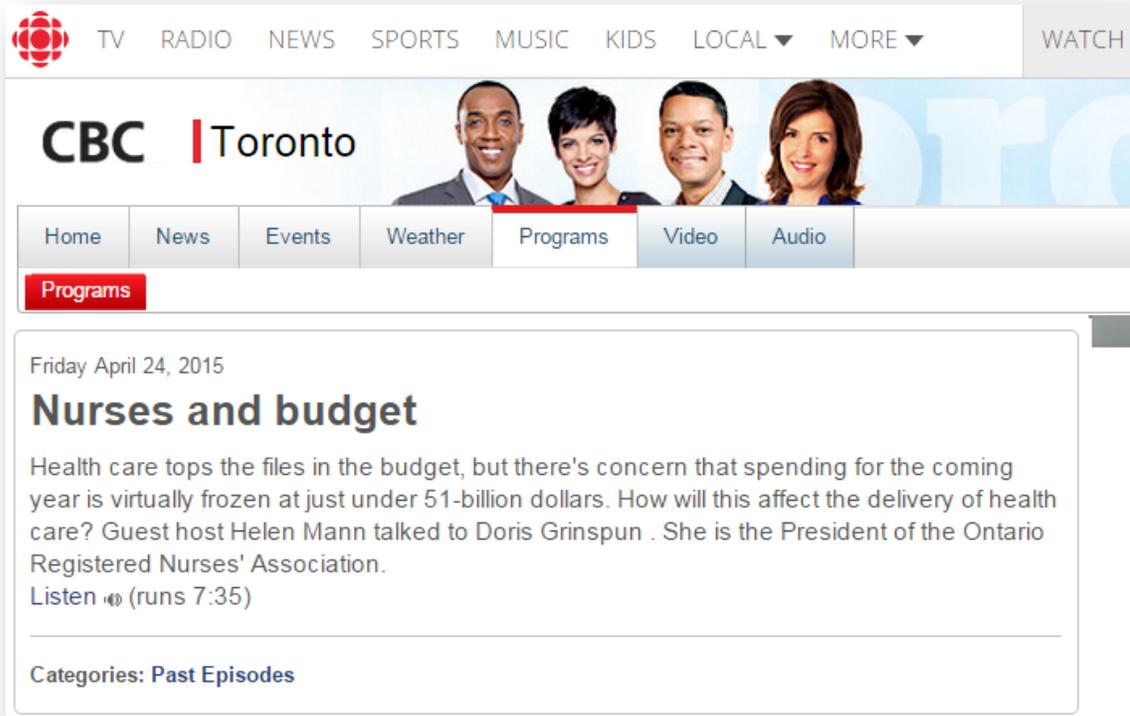
For broadcast media, select radio and TV stations with programs, news anchors, hosts, or producers who are most likely to run your story, or that have already shown an interest in health care.

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 print space is usually not as fierce.

Check newspapers, radio and TV regularly to identify people who show an interest in health and nursing 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.

Remember: RNAO's communications department has an up-to-date directory of Ontario media contacts. Upon request, you can receive a list of media outlets with phone numbers, email addresses and names of key personnel. Alternatively, once the media advisory has been drafted, a member of RNAO's communications department can send the advisory to media in your area for you.

Example: Doris Grinspun does CBC Interview on the Provincial Budget (April 24 2015)



The screenshot shows the CBC Toronto website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for TV, RADIO, NEWS, SPORTS, MUSIC, KIDS, LOCAL, and MORE, along with a WATCH button. Below this is a banner for CBC Toronto featuring four news anchors. A secondary navigation bar includes Home, News, Events, Weather, Programs, Video, and Audio. The 'Programs' section is highlighted in red. The main content area displays the date 'Friday April 24, 2015' and the title 'Nurses and budget'. The text below the title reads: 'Health care tops the files in the budget, but there's concern that spending for the coming year is virtually frozen at just under 51-billion dollars. How will this affect the delivery of health care? Guest host Helen Mann talked to Doris Grinspun . She is the President of the Ontario Registered Nurses' Association.' Below this is a 'Listen' button with a speaker icon and the text '(runs 7:35)'. At the bottom of the content area, it says 'Categories: Past Episodes'.

To listen to the full interview visit: <http://www.cbc.ca/metromorning/episodes/2015/04/24/nurses-and-budget/>

Letters to the editor

The Letters to the Editor section of 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? Word lengths vary from newspaper to newspaper, but the best rule of thumb is to keep it under 300 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 double 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. Email your letter to ensure a quick delivery.

If you are modeling your letter on one submitted by RNAO, try to rewrite the major points in your own words. An original letter with your own local experiences has far more impact.

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 feel free to have RNAO's director of communications or a member of the department review your letter before sending it out.

Example: Media Advisory

Top nursing association highlights recommendations to prevent abuse and neglect of older adults

2014-06-10

Marion Zych

TORONTO, June 10, 2014 - The abuse and neglect of older adults is a critical health and social problem with profound consequences. That's why, on June 13, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is highlighting key, evidence-based recommendations designed to help prevent and address this pervasive and devastating concern.

The recommendations are contained in RNAO's forthcoming best practice guideline (BPG). Dr. Elizabeth Podnieks, founder of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, and Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Mount Sinai and the University Health Network hospitals in Toronto and expert lead of Ontario's Seniors Strategy, along with representatives from RNAO, will be on hand to speak to the recommendations.

Both Podnieks and Sinha co-led a panel of Canadian experts involved in the development of the BPG, which aims to influence health-care workers and organizations, educators, families and the public. Panel experts included representatives from patient advocacy groups, nursing, medicine, social work, law, policy, rural and remote communities, and education across the spectrum of care in Canada.

The guideline's recommendations focus on clinical practice, education, and organizations/health system policy, and can be used across all health-care settings. The BPG is part of a three-year RNAO initiative to prevent and address abuse and neglect of older adults and is funded by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program.

Members of the media are welcome to attend this event, which is being held two days before World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

WHAT: RNAO releases recommendations to prevent abuse and neglect of older adults

WHO: Representatives from RNAO and Dr. Elizabeth Podnieks, founder of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, and Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at Mount Sinai and the University Health Network hospitals in Toronto and expert lead of Ontario's Seniors Strategy.

WHERE: RNAO's home office: 158 Pearl Street, Toronto, ON. M5H 1L3.

WHEN: Friday, June 13, 2014. This event begins at 9:30 a.m. A live stream will also be available on www.RNAO.ca

RNAO's Best Practice Guidelines Program is funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and was launched in 1999 to provide the best available evidence for patient care across a wide range of health-care settings. The 50 guidelines developed to date are a substantial contribution towards building excellence in Ontario's health system. They are available to all health professionals in Canada and abroad. To learn more about RNAO's Nursing Best Practice Guidelines Program or to view these resources, please visit www.RNAO.ca/bpg

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario is the professional association representing registered nurses in Ontario. Since 1925, RNAO has advocated 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.

For more information about RNAO, visit www.RNAO.ca

You can also check out our Facebook page at www.RNAO.org/facebook and follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/RNAO.

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To arrange an interview with a nurse, or for more information, please contact:

Marion Zych,
Director of Communications, RNAO
Cell: 647-406-5605 / Phone: 416-408-5605
Toll free: 1-800-268-7199 ext. 209
mzych@rnao.ca

Example: Media Release

Nurses say elder abuse must be brought out into the open

2011-06-13

Marion Zych

TORONTO, June 13, 2011 – A growing number of Canadian seniors are rapidly becoming vulnerable to elder abuse.

As World Elder Abuse Awareness Day approaches, (June 15) the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) together with the Canadian Nurses Association is shining a spotlight on the problem in a bid to bring the issue out into the open.

According to Statistics Canada, seniors over the age of 65 represented 13 per cent of the population in 2009. In that year, 7,900 incidences of elder abuse were reported, an increase of 14 per cent since 2004. Advocates for the elderly say such abuse can take various forms from physical and emotional to sexual, financial and neglect.

RNAO launched a project by selecting 10 long-term care homes across Canada to take part. The Prevention of Elder Abuse Centres of Excellence (PEACE) sites are located in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

The goal of each site is to increase awareness and understanding among health-care providers of elder abuse and enhance their capacity to respond to situations of abuse.

“This is a very difficult issue that we have to confront. Abuse of any sort is wrong. What’s especially troubling is that the victims themselves are sometimes afraid to speak out. That’s why this project is so important. We need to raise awareness so that everyone from members of the public to health-care workers know what measures to take if they spot an instance of elder abuse and how to prevent it,” says Heather McConnell, a registered nurse with RNAO and one of the leads on the project.

McConnell adds residents in long-term care can be especially vulnerable because people in long-term care are older, frailer and have more complex needs.

“Nurses and other health-care professionals have an important front-line role to play in recognizing and reporting elder abuse. We have a moral and ethical duty to protect the well-being of our patients and this new initiative is a very positive step in the right direction,” says Judith Shamian, President of the Canadian Nurses Association.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario is the professional association representing registered nurses in Ontario. Since 1925, RNAO has advocated 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.

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program. For more information about RNAO, visit our website at www.rnao.ca. You can also check out our Facebook page at www.rnao.ca/facebook and follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/rnao.

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To arrange an interview with a nurse in one of the cities involved in the project or for more information, please contact:

Marion Zych,
Director of Communications, RNAO
Cell: 647-406-5605 / Phone: 416-408-5605
Toll free: 1-800-268-7199 ext. 209
mzych@rnao.ca

Lisa Brazeau
Director, Communications and Member Outreach /
Directrice du service des communications et relations avec les membres
Canadian Nurses Association / Association des infirmières et infirmiers du Canada
50 Driveway, Ottawa, ON K2P 1E2
613-237-2159 ext / poste 252
613-864-1371 cell
www.cna-aiic.ca

Example: Letters to the editor

On health care
The Globe and Mail
Thu Aug 16 2012
Page: A14
Section: Letter to the Editor
Byline: Doris Grinspun

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On health care

The federal government's failure to grasp the important role it plays in the delivery of health care in Canada is mind-boggling (**Health Minister Stands By Ottawa's Role** – Aug. 14).

We agree wholeheartedly with the Canadian Medical Association that equity and fairness are central tenets of our health-care system. Nurses and physicians also know there are gaps in services between rural and urban areas across this country. The results of a survey released this week by the CMA offers further proof that aboriginal communities and people living in poverty aren't getting the attention they deserve when it comes to their care needs.

Nurses call for Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq to come to the table and engage premiers, territorial leaders and the public in a serious dialogue about a new health accord so we can chart the right direction for our system.

Doris Grinspun, CEO, Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

Nursing group working toward ending poverty
Guelph Mercury
Thu Jun 17, 2010
Page: A10

Jun 17, 2010 | Vote  0  0

Nursing group work toward ending poverty

Guelph Mercury

Re:

The Wellington Chapter of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) congratulates Guelph MPP Liz Sandals on her recent appointment to the position of parliamentary assistant to Deb Mathews, the minister of health and long-term care. Bold leadership is required to make and support necessary changes that will lead to healthier people and communities.

Nurses know from their practice that many things affect one's ability to be healthy. Tackling poverty and creating a cleaner environment, for example, are essential. Among other things, the RNAO has recommended in its recent *Creating Vibrant Communities* report the immediate increase in the minimum wage to \$13.25 an hour, the establishment of additional nurse practitioner-led clinics, an increase in the nursing workforce, the fast-tracking the provincial housing plan "because safe affordable housing is essential to good health," and the implementation of both the poverty reduction plan and the Pascal report on full-day kindergarten and turning schools into community hubs.

Nurses know this can be done.

During Nursing Week in May, Sandals visited the Guelph Family Health Team, where she had a glimpse of the many successes and the challenges of nurses and the complex health system. Her level of understanding of these issues and commitment to act was impressive. The RNAO, and its local Wellington Chapter, is committed to working closely with Sandals to advocate for the changes required to reform health care and create healthy vibrant communities in Wellington County and throughout the province.

Susan Yates

Guelph