



## Engaging the Media: Being interviewed

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*“Scientists used to be told that dealing with the media would be professional death; now they are being told that not dealing with the media will be professional death.”*

– Dr Rob Morrison, Australian Science Communicator.

Health and medical research is one of the most widely reported sources of news. At some point in your primary health care research career, you are likely to be invited to take part in a media interview. This will be a vital opportunity to publicise your research specialty area and your latest research findings. All researchers can benefit from preparation; the media is reactive and unpredictable and you never know when your interview opportunity may arise. Whether you are preparing to be interviewed for print, online, radio or television media, this fact sheet will be a useful guide.

### The ‘should do’ of being interviewed

Relaying research outcomes to the public is a moral imperative.

It is also increasingly a requirement of grant funding bodies (e.g. National Health and Medical Research Council<sup>1</sup>, Australian Research Council) that researchers include a ‘media summary’ for public release in their applications. Researchers often avoid the media because they are apprehensive about being interviewed or concerned they will either say the wrong thing or have their research incorrectly portrayed. You can lessen these concerns by following some of the steps below.

This fact sheet outlines the before, during and after of ‘being interviewed’. Researchers can be proactive with getting their research out there; use your media release to bait an interview. Read our fact sheet on *Writing a succinct media release* in conjunction with this fact sheet because your media release may be the springboard for the interview.

### Before the interview

#### Know why you are being interviewed

An interview opportunity arises when:

- the reporter is running a news story on a particular health issue and they need an expert to comment
- a reporter wants a ‘reaction’ in response to a news story
- a reporter has seen your media release or social media activities and is keen to run a story
- you are the official spokesperson for an organisation or institute.

#### Know your message

- Know what you want to get out of the interview - there may be a particular topical ‘peg’ or angle that you can ‘hang’ your story on.
- Prepare a generic ‘grab’ (9-11 seconds long) comprising three succinct points and aim to make these three points in two sentences - have your grab rehearsed and ready to go.
- If you know about the interview in advance you can tailor your ‘grab’ in line with the aims of the interview and the reporter’s end story.
- Know your audience so your communication style can suit. Research the journalist and publication online and through social media, prior to the interview<sup>2</sup>.

#### Don’t fear what they may ask

- Anticipate that the journalist will ask ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘why’, and ‘how’. Practice asking these questions of your work and prepare clear, concise answers.

#### Timing

- Never feel like you have to participate in an on-the-spot interview. If you need time to collect your thoughts, request time (even just five minutes thinking space can improve preparedness).

#### Are there any pictures?

- Media stories are more likely to be published or go to air when you can provide visuals (a picture for print media, footage for television, or both for online).

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## Know when to say 'no'

- You can turn down an interview or prevent it going to press/public, but only do so if you think your work may be misrepresented or the interview could compromise your credibility in any way.
- If you are unsure, or inexperienced with dealing with the media, your organisation may have its own communications and media team who will be able to help you decide what you want to say and how to say it<sup>3</sup>.

## During the interview

### Have the gift of the 'grab'

- During the interview, stick to your pre-prepared 'grab'.
- The grab is under your control. Sticking to your grab keeps you in safe territory.
- Do not feel tempted to fill silence. Only deviate if you feel absolutely comfortable doing so. Working outside of your practiced grab opens you to the risk of saying something off the cuff that could be misinterpreted.

### Respond to a question with the question

- Media interviews are often edited into extracts and broadcast with other edited news stories during news bulletins.
- To make your interview easy to cut up and slot into any news story (and ensure you get your air time!) respond to the question with the question as part of the response (e.g. Question: Why are you studying the role of general practice nurses in Australian health care? Response: I'm studying the role of general practice nurses in Australian health care because...)
- Without the context of the question, your statement can not be used as an extracted quote.

### Keep it safe

- Know the controversial 'dangerous' areas that arise in your research and create a standard response to 'tricky' questions or a response that avoids this altogether (e.g. 'that's beyond the scope of my study', 'the point you make is interesting, but my area of expertise is...').

### Be the expert

- You are the expert so speak like an expert.
- Articulate your statements in a way that shows you know what you are talking about.
- Do not make it sound like you are asking for affirmation.
- Use jargon free language that non-scientists are sure to understand. Be ready with simple examples and analogies about your research that will make good quotes<sup>4</sup>.

## After the interview

### Keep a record

- Request contact details of the journalist who interviewed you.
- You may be permitted to add further detail to your initial interview before it goes to print/air.
- Try to develop a rapport with the reporter so they keep you in mind for future interview opportunities.
- Add the interview experience to your CV, (e.g. The Being Interviewed Radio Show, 20 January, 2014. 99.9 FM Radio, interview.)

### Twitter Tip

Use social media to promote your interview to peers, the public and other media organisations to develop your reputation as an expert who interacts well with the media.

## Resources

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). How to work with the media: Interview preparation for the psychologist. Retrieved January 2014 from <http://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/media/index.aspx>

PHCRIS Getting Started Guides: How to... Promote your research to the media [http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media\\_promote.php](http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media_promote.php)

PHCRIS Getting Started Guides: How to... Write a succinct media release [http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media\\_release.php](http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media_release.php)

PHCRIS Getting Started Guides: How to... Be interviewed by the media [http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media\\_interview.php](http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media_interview.php)

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## References

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- 2 Science Media Savvy. (2012). Tips from scientists who deal with the media regularly. Retrieved January 2014 from <http://sciencemediasavvy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/1-SMS-Tips-from-scientists.pdf>
- 3 Flinders University. (2013). Media FAQs. Retrieved January 2014 from <http://www.flinders.edu.au/marketing-communications/training-and-support/media-training-and-support/media---frequently-asked-questions.cfm#ajournalistapproachdme>
- 4 Science Media Savvy. (n.d.). Tips for print and online interviews. Retrieved January 2014 from <http://sciencemediasavvy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2-SMS-print-and-online-tips.pdf>



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