

Getting publicity and dealing with the press

Simon Crompton provides a step-by-step guide to how to ensure a media campaign gets maximum exposure.

For many years, WCPT has encouraged Member Organisations and individual physical therapists to become involved in campaigning on issues of international importance for physical therapists and their clients. But how do you go about doing this? How do you raise the profile of an issue in newspapers, magazines, television and radio?

It's certainly not as simple as sending out a press release to all and sundry. The following step-by-step guide may provide some pointers.

Step 1: What do you want to achieve?

The key first step in mounting a publicity campaign is to define what you want to achieve. This aim should be simple and focused. You need to know whom you are aiming at, and if possible an idea of what end result you want.

"To make policy makers around the country more aware of the unique role of physical therapists in rehabilitating the victims of landmines" is a good aim, because it has a clearly defined outcome and audience.

It is possible to have more than one objective for a publicity campaign, but be realistic.

Your audience may be very broad – the public in general, for example.

But it is often better to have a specific target: for example, patients, doctors, politicians.

Step 2: What is your message?

You need to be able to express the aims of your campaign in simple language that can be understood by anyone. You also need to consider what you want your audience to do in response to your campaign.

For example, in your torture campaign, you may want politicians to add their names to a petition giving voice to your message: "We, the undersigned, believe that there should be more specialist health facilities for the victims of torture."

Step 3: Which parts of the media do you want to contact?

There is little point in talking to all the media about your campaign. Your story will only be of interest to certain newspapers, journals, newsletters and television channels. Magazines dominated by fashion are unlikely to be interested in a feature on torture.

The audience you identified in step 2 is the key to identifying which parts of the media you should contact. If you are trying to reach the general public, local and national newspapers and women's magazines may be stand the greatest chance of reaching large numbers. But the best way to get through to policy makers may be through professional magazines, newsletters and individual approaches. Politicians may be

reached through the national newspapers read by the people the government listens to.


It's a good idea to put some real effort into researching all the possible media outlets for the audience you want – there are directories which list media under areas of interest. Study the media yourself to find out what sort of stories they cover and in what ways.

Remember that being on a national news programme may be high profile, but it may not always be the best way of achieving your objectives. For example, WCPT has found that a good way of spreading awareness about issues relevant to physical therapists is to encourage national professional bodies to include an item in their journal or newsletter. This might not be the most glamorous form of publicity, but it can be a very effective way of getting the message through to the right people. So always consider how useful local outlets and small publications might be to you.

Step 4: Work out your story

If you are going to approach national newspapers, magazines, television and radio outlets, you will need a "story" to sell your message. Few journalists devote time and space to an issue just because you want them to - there has to be news.

"News" is a new piece of information of interest to the reader of that particular paper. It might, for example, be based on a new report



with important findings, or a survey you have carried out, or someone saying something outspoken. This interesting new development can act as a vehicle to carry your message.

So consider whether you can create anything newsworthy which can help you carry your message. Try:

- conducting a survey
- writing/commissioning a report
- compiling interesting facts and figures from interesting sources
- asking a celebrity or politician for support
- getting some strong quotes from a senior person on the subject.

Sometimes there are international bodies which can provide you with help on finding such news angles. The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (www.irct.org), for example, provides packs to help people gain publicity for the International Day in Support of the Victims of Torture.

You can further increase your chances of gaining important local coverage by making the story relevant to a particular area. For example, a survey that provides results for individual regions can provide a story with a strong local angle.

Step 5: Make things easy for the media

If you want media coverage you have to give the media what they need.

This can prove very effective at a very basic level. For example, some local papers, small magazines and newsletters work on very limited resources and are crying out for interesting "ready-made" articles. If you prepare an article that is useful and present it well, they are quite likely to use it. So if you think small publications will be useful to you in getting your message across, check what their requirements are.

Launching

If you are planning a big media launch, make sure it is at a convenient time and place for the media. Make the event short and efficient, with plenty of opportunity for questions so that the media get what they need quickly and easily. If possible pick a relevant location so that media people can get some appropriate pictures. Ensure there are enough power points in the room if you are expecting television and radio.

Background information

The media may need background information to flesh out their story – for example, how many people are affected by torture, how many specialist facilities are available around the world? A profile of your organisation may also be useful.

Provide this background information as succinctly as possible in briefing notes, in a press pack or accompanying a press release.

Provide real people

Journalists always like to hear real people talking about their views and experiences – because that's what we all like reading or hearing. It makes a story seem more personal and interesting. So try and provide people who are talking from the heart about their experiences. But make sure they are happy to have exposure in the media, and try and prepare them before any launch event – run through the questions they are likely to be asked, and make sure they understand the message you are trying to get across.

"Hooks"

It's a good idea to release your story or launch your campaign on a day which makes it more "current" – this will make it more attractive to the media. This might be, for example:

- an anniversary related to your campaign

- the day on which/before a report on the subject is released
- an internationally recognised day related to your subject

These can all be "hooks" for a journalist to hang a news story on. Try and avoid other huge news stories which you can predict – the start of the World Cup, for example! It's often a good idea to pick a quieter time, when the media may be crying out for stories.

Pictures

Line-ups of people don't usually make very interesting photographs. Try and think how you might make photo opportunities for the media interesting – by using props related to your subject, or unusual settings, for example.

Keynotes is a series of occasional papers dealing with important professional, practice and policy issues relevant to physical therapists across the world, and to the development of physical therapy internationally.

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