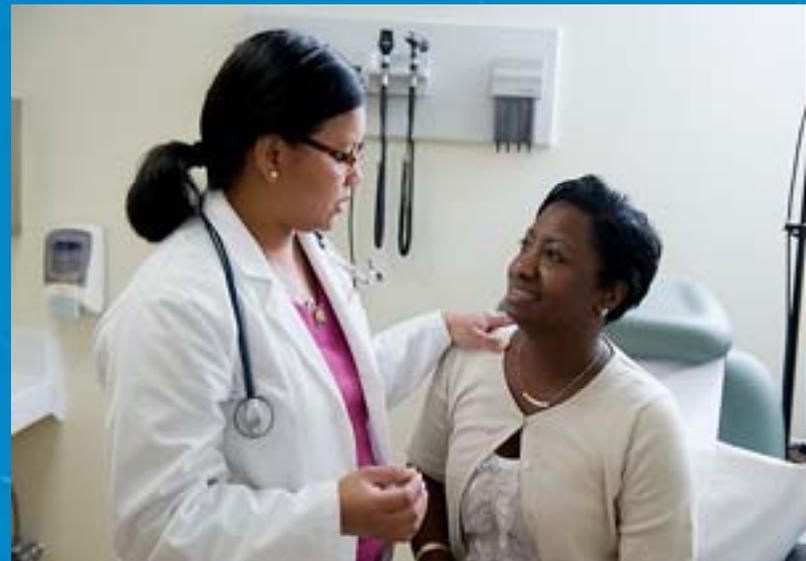


Media Pointers:

Telling Your VA Women's Health Research Story

And why media can be your new best friend

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Why and How Research and Media Mix

My goal in this training is to

1. Make you more confident about sharing your research with the media
2. Help you understand the different types of media
3. And get you to embrace the idea of doing media interviews

Additionally, I want to talk about how important it is to get your message out – **Important for you, for your research, for VA and mostly for women Veterans.**



3 Basic Assumptions

1. Reporters are not out to get you.

2. You have control over interviews.

3. Interviews = Opportunities

***4. Assume no one else is a scientist.**



Mother Theresa:



**“It is harder to face media than
to bathe a leper.”**

How to Make the Story Your Story

Interview Basics

- Know why you were asked for the interview
- Know the audience
- Know the format and theme of the program
- Establish ground rules

Do Your Homework

- Know your subject
- Anticipate questions
- Current events
- Look for good B-roll
- Potential Veteran participation



Dos and Don'ts



Dos

- Be positive
- Conclusion first, then expand to backup facts
- Use short quotes
- Make your point and stop
- Listen carefully
- Speak the public's English



Don'ts

- Lie or exaggerate
- Avoid jargon & acronyms- speak everyday language
- Say "no comment"
- Accept reporter's misinformation/facts
- Give information "off the record"

The 4 C's



- **Commercial**
- **Credibility**
- **Cosmetics**
- **Control**

The “ABC” Method of Control



A = Acknowledge the question

B = Bridge phrase to where you want to go

C = Use your Commercials



What a Good Research Story Can Do

Your Story Can:

- Change the way VA and the world sees women Veterans
- Recruit new women Veterans into VA research
- Help with additional funding for your research or get new funding
- Remind other researchers to include women in their studies

Story Cycle:

- Local TV news -- reaches audiences of 10,000 – 100,000 depending on location, few Veterans
- Local newspapers – reaches audiences of 5,000-25,000, few Veterans
- National TV & print stories – reach a much broader audience, but still few Veterans
- **Posting the links to these stories on VA, VHA and facility Websites, Facebooks and Twitter – reaches over 525,000 including many Veterans , their families and our employees**



You Are Not Alone



Help is right around the corner

- Reach out to your public affairs officer at your medical center
- PAOs can help you, guide you and assist you in developing your key messages.
- Use your PR staff – they know the kinds of questions you will be asked. They know how to find the right media to sell your story.
- It's your job to keep them aware of all the great things you and your program are accomplishing.

and at VACO, too

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MEDIA Guide



***Media and
Interview Tips
for VA Employees
Who Work With
News Media***

Notes



Your Basic Checklist

Before you accept the interview:

- Who is the audience?
- What is the issue to be discussed?
- What is the format?
- Who will be the interviewer?
- Is there a hidden agenda?
- What is the cost/benefit?

Prior to the interview:

- Practice questions and answers.
- Avoid acronyms and jargon but be prepared to explain those you must use.
- Be familiar with current news items...some may trigger a question.
- Check dress, grooming
- Establish a rapport with the reporter.
- Review the ground rules.

During the interview:

- Avoid hypothetical questions.
- Be confident and calm.
- Listen carefully.
- Keep eye contact with interviewer.
- Don't forget your key messages.
- Never say "no comment".

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Introduction

As an government agency, VA has a responsibility to provide accurate and timely information to the general public and the media.

As a VA employee, you may be asked to speak to media as a subject matter expert or to respond to an inquiry. That's why this guide was developed.

Dealing with media can be a daunting, but understanding how media operates, focusing on your messages and learning a few helpful tips can make the process comfortable, positive and controlled. It's important to see that media presents us with an *opportunity* to tell our stories.

Whether it's a face-to-face interview, a telephone interview or with a camera focused on you, it is important to be at your best and project your best image when communicating VA's message. We hope this guide will provide you with useful information and some easy tips to help you with your media interviews.



Body Language

Non-verbal communication is as important as your verbal messages on television. Impressions often outweigh substance and attention must be paid to how you look and the subtleties of how we communicate with our eyes, hands, posture, etc. Here are some key points on body language:

- Avoid darting eyes and keep focused on the interviewer. Do not look into the camera.
- Keep your head up.
- Don't slouch or lean to one side. Hold still in swivel chairs.
- Use natural hand gestures for emphasis.
- Don't "death-grip" the arms of the chair or cross your arms.
- Lean slightly forward to convey engagement in the conversation.
- Don't play with rings, bracelets and other jewelry.
- Keep hands out of your pockets and avoid rocking when standing.

Examples of other bridging statements:

- “Yes...” (the answer), “and in addition to that...” (the bridge).
- “No...” (the answer), “let me explain...” (the bridge).
- “I don’t know...but what I do know is...”
- “That’s the way it used to be...here’s what we do now...”
- “The most important thing to remember is...”
- “I think it boils down to these three things...”
- “Let’s not lose site of the most important point...”
- “That’s not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...”
- “That’s a good point, but I think you’d be interested in knowing that...”
- “Before we get off that subject, let me add...”
- That’s an important point because...”



Media have an important job to do. They provide a network of understanding, decode and interpret information and provide a source for organizations attempting to speak. More importantly they are a 24/7 watchdog. We need media...and they need us.

Most reporters are not “out to get you”. They have a job to do, one that may require them to look to you as the expert who can provide accurate information. We must respect and understand the challenges they are up against...including a revolution in how their world is changing and impacting how they gather and report news.

According to recent research, getting news in one form or another remains a daily habit for most Americans, however fewer than half of all Americans now report reading a daily newspaper on a regular basis.

Newspapers across the country are in decline and many have already folded. Instead, online sources of news are gaining viewership against television and newspapers across all age groups but particularly among young people.

Some of media's challenges are:

- **Changing Media:** The world of media is changing... staffing is being cut and reporters are being required to do more with less.
- **Short Deadlines:** Reporters are almost always under short deadlines so it is in our best interest to be prepared to react on short notice.
- **Time-Space Limitations:** Print and electronic media use very little space or time to tell a story. Therefore, we must be brief and to the point.
- **Inexperienced Reporters:** Many reporters know little about VA, therefore we need to educate them. Also most stories are written as though they would be read or heard by an audience at an eighth grade level. Make sure your responses are clear and concise.
- **Competition:** Journalists can be aggressive in pursuing a story in order to break a story first. Also with the speed of online information, reporters are even more under the gun to get a story filed. We must ensure that despite time constraints, we tell VA's story appropriately and accurately.



Bridging Techniques

Bridging is a technique used to move from one aspect of an issue to another. It is especially effective when an interview is going in a direction you don't want to go. You "bridge" your way back to the messages you want to talk about. This technique is critical in maintaining control of an interview.

Example:

Reporter: "We hear that some veterans don't want to come to VA because it's substandard care. Should the VA system be retired?"

Response: "*On the contrary*, VA is now a leader in health care and has been cited in major medical publications and general publications like Newsweek, that our system is actually setting the benchmark for quality control, computerized record systems and many other key areas of modern medicine. This is not your grandfather's VA."

In this example, the responder does not repeat the negative words used by the reporter and instead uses the phrase "on the contrary" as a bridge to get back to the positive messages that VA is a leader in health care. The last phrase is very quotable also.

During an interview:

- Be yourself.
- Listen carefully.
- Know your message(s).
- Stick to your area of expertise only.
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know".
- Avoid jargon, acronyms. Speak plainly, briefly and to the point.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Don't give personal opinions and don't deal with hypothetical questions or "what if's".
- Personalize your answers.
- Never repeat or introduce a negative.
- Answer questions with a.) a conclusion, b.) an explanation/transition, and c.) your core message.
- Keep your cool under fire—don't argue.
- Correct misinformation respectfully.
- Never say "no comment".



Radio interviews can be done over the phone or in person, but have the great advantage of allowing you to have notes that you can refer to if you need them since no one can see you.

Other points to remember with radio:

- **Know the Audience:** Target your remarks to the interests and concerns of that particular audience.
- **Your Voice is Your Tool:** Keep your voice interesting through variety, tone and inflection. It's your only tool for holding the audience's interest.
- **Conversational and Brief:** Make your points in a conversational way. Answers over 20-30 seconds are over-answering.
- **Enthusiasm:** Be positive and enthusiastic and show you have conviction. End each segment with an upbeat, summarizing benefit.
- **"On-the-Air":** Assume you're always on-the-air. Don't say anything you don't want to hear broadcast over the air waves.



Print Tips

Print media has the advantage of being able to go further in depth with a story than either TV or radio. Other points to remember :

- **Materials:** Supply the reporter with materials that help clarify a complex issue before the interview.
- **Photos:** If a photographer is coming with the writer, think about some ideas for photos/photo opportunities that will help you tell your story.
- **Third Parties:** Reporters often like human stories to illustrate the topic. For example, if VA pioneered a new heart surgery technique, a reporter may want to talk to a veteran who had the procedure.
- **Taping:** If you have an interview on a hot topic or with a particularly challenging reporter, you can tape record the interview. Let the reporter know before the interview begins.
- **After the Interview:** Don't ask the reporter to see the article before it goes to print and don't ask him/her to send you a copy. Offer your availability if the reporter needs further clarification. If the article is positive/balanced, call the reporter to thank him/her.



Interview Basics

Your Interview Bill of Rights



You have the right...

- To know who is interviewing you
- To have ground rules
- To have your public affairs officer present
- To be told if you are being recorded
- To have time to get your points across
- To set a time limit on the interview

Other points to consider:

- Ask yourself, “If I could make just one point about this subject, what would it be?” Build your responses around this key message.
- Ask yourself what questions veterans or community members would ask.
- Determine what facts or statistics you should have handy.
- Ask yourself what are the most controversial or sensitive questions that may be asked by the reporter.
- Practice, practice, practice!!!



Television is visual, therefore, how you look, act and body language are as important as what you say. Other points to remember:

- **Format:** Watch the show before you go on to get an idea of its format—is it one-on-one, a panel show or one with an audience? Observe the interviewer’s style.
- **Sound Bites:** Talk in a conversational tone and keep your answers concise. Think in terms of sound-bites and don’t use VA “jargon”.
- **Sitting/Standing:** If sitting, don’t swivel your chair or drum your fingers on the arms. If standing, don’t rock back and forth, put your hands in your pockets or stand in a “fig-leaf” position.
- **Relax:** Take a few deep breaths before you go on, smile, keep eye contact with the reporter and speak in a conversational style.
- **Attire:** Conservative, simple and tasteful are best. Lightweight clothing helps under the bright camera lights. Doctors can wear a white coat to convey credibility. If make-up is offered by the studio, accept it.



Telephone Interview Tips

When you are called on the phone by a reporter who wants to interview you on the spot, here are some helpful tips:

- **Key Information:** Never accept an interview when first called, but find out who you are talking to, when their deadline is, their contact information and key information they are seeking. Always insist on a call-back time at which you can call the reporter back.
- **Time Limit:** Set a time limit and keep it. Remind the reporter of your time limit by saying “I only have time for one more question.”
- **Notes:** Keep notes handy so you can find all information you need.
- **Vacuums:** Don’t fill vacuums of silence. The report may be writing, thinking, looking something up or waiting for you to volunteer something more juicy.
- **Call Backs:** If you promise the reporter more information, ask someone else to call them back with it. Otherwise you have re-opened the entire interview.



Preparing Your Messages

Before you do an interview, know why you were asked to do it, what you want to say and how you want to say it.

- You should have **2 or 3 key messages** (“silver bullets”) that are positive and offer something to the audience.
- For each message, have 2 supporting messages that you can use to back up your primary message.
- Messages should be **brief and to the point**. Think in terms of “sound bites” (no more than 20 words). This helps make them more quotable.

Example:

Key Message #1: VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the world.

Supporting Message A: VA employs more than 14,000 physicians and more than 50,000 nurses.

Supporting Message B: In 2005 alone, there were some 57 million outpatient visits to VA facilities nationwide.