

Media 101 for Homeopaths

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Summary: As homeopathy grows in popularity, it appears more and more in the media. As a result, we as homeopaths may be contacted by reporters for interviews about homeopathic medicine. The purpose of this article is to prepare our members for these interviews by offering five helpful tips on working with the media. The more comfortable one is with the media, the greater our opportunity for spreading the truth about homeopathy.

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As medical professionals, we constantly interact with our patients. We have informed consent discussions with them where we candidly review the possible risks and benefits of homeopathic treatment, as well as other possible treatments available, and the expected outcomes. Openness is the key to good doctor-patient communication. However, unlike our talks with our patients, our conversations with the media may not be as comfortable. We're afraid our words might be twisted or our two-hour conversation with a reporter might be reduced to a single controversial sound bite taken out of context. If done properly though, a media interview can increase awareness of your practice, drive business, and establish you as an authority. As healthcare professionals, we need a little professional training and practice in the communications field.

To help you represent the homeopathic field and yourself as best as possible, here are five helpful tips on how to work with the media and prepare for an interview.

1. *Research the opportunity* — both the reporter who will interview you and the news outlet that will publish the piece. Does the reporter or the publication have a history of printing pro or con articles pertaining to alternative medicine or to your subject matter? What is their purpose or mission? Who is their audience? Various types of media may present one story several different ways depending on their purpose and audience. Creating an edge or writing about a controversial topic is how reporters attract readers and compete with other publications. For example, a dermatologist was recently interviewed by a trade journal for osteopathic dermatology. As he enthusiastically practices homeopathy, the dermatologist was asked to share advice on incorporating homeopathy into his practice. The published piece¹ was extremely positive; there was no skepticism towards homeopathy and the reporter printed several quotes from the dermatologist. In contrast, one of

the authors of this article was recently interviewed for a piece in a top ten newspaper with national syndication and had a very different experience.² He felt misrepresented by the story; so he submitted a letter to the editor requesting a correction be published.³

2. *Evaluate whether to engage in a discussion with the reporter.* After Step 1, you should have an idea if the interview will be friendly or adversarial. The decision to engage is easy if you feel the article will benefit you and homeopathy, or at least be presented in a fair and balanced manner. Conversely, if you feel the article will be against homeopathy, weigh the risks. How many people will see the article? Is the audience important to you? Will the article live on via the web? You might be tempted to think this writer just needs to be educated on the facts. While that might be true, your input most likely will not convince a known sceptic. Keep your communications with a sceptic very brief, in writing (email), and don't stray from a pre-determined message. And remember, declining the opportunity might be the most beneficial option.

3. *Be prepared.* Ask the reporter for his questions before the interview takes place. If he declines, ask for the general concept of the article. Write down three to five main points you want to get across during the interview, but remember, it's not about you. It's about your audience and what they care about—safe, effective treatment options. Keep these points in front of you if interviewed over the phone. Anticipate questions the reporter might ask, especially the hard ones, and have responses ready. Volunteer to provide the reporter with a written summary of information, main points or statistics. Ask someone to walk you through a mock interview.

4. *Understand the different types of media.* Interviews that

will eventually be written into print media like newspapers and magazines are longer. You can provide more detail, but it is also easier to stray off your message. Radio and television interviews typically are very short. Professional media trainers recommend that you practice delivering key messages out loud in concise, conversational and easy to understand phrases.

Interviews are a two-way street. It is your interview too, so don't reactively wait for a question. Seize any opportunity to share your message; keep your main objectives in mind, and provide examples to support them. (For example, homeopathy is safe, clinically proven, and cost-effective.) Ask for clarification of questions, and speak in complete thoughts — edits are always being made; so your response should be as inclusive as possible. Again, professional media trainers suggest "bridging" back to topics you want to discuss to keep the interview focused. To make this transition, they recommend using phrases like, "What you might find interesting is...", or "It's important for you to understand...", or "That's not my area of expertise, but I can tell you..." or "That's an interesting question, but the real issue is..." Stick to your subject — the facts about homeopathy—and do not speculate. Offer to find answers to questions you may not know or recommend someone more knowledgeable to the reporter.

5. *Get professional help.* Call the National Center for Homeopathy (NCH) or one of the makers of homeopathic medicines. The NCH and these companies have staff members devoted to media relations that would welcome the chance to help you prepare for an interview. Sound bites have been created to reinforce a consistent, factual message about homeopathy. These sound bites do not use professional or technical jargon — they use lay terms that are more reporter- and reader-friendly.

For example, the NCH uses the following statement to describe homeopathy: "Homeopathy is a 200-year-old system of medicine used successfully by over 200 million people worldwide. It has an extensively documented clinical record, and there are hundreds of high-quality peer-reviewed basic science, pre-clinical and clinical studies showing its effects." For further information, both the NCH and the AIH websites

have extremely thorough and useful research sections.

As the field of homeopathy continues to grow, we need doctors to share their positive experiences with homeopathic medicines with reporters, who will then share these stories with their readers. We need your authority and expertise as a doctor, as well as your passion for educating patients on these safe, natural choices. To do so, you must be comfortable speaking with the media. Partnering with the media is essential if we want to continue to share the benefits of homeopathic medicines with the world.

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