

Chapter 14

Top Ten Tips for Media Advocacy

Just as “all politics is local,” all politicians read their local papers and pay attention to their local news. Congressional staffers in each Member’s office are dedicated to monitoring local media coverage of their bosses, issues of interest and priority to constituents, and other related items. Anytime the Member’s name appears in print or on broadcast media, s/he knows about it. When you are the person who has mentioned their name or is responsible for getting their name in print, you have usually elevated your standing with that Member and his or her office.

Likewise, when your name appears in print, it gives you additional third-party credibility. Every media mention of you or ARN should be sent by e-mail or fax (whichever is the staffer’s preferred mode of communication) to the Congressional staffer with whom you work in each Congressional office with whom you are responsible for maintaining a relationship. Staffers maintain files on all major issues and when the time comes to reach out or seek consultation from a constituent expert, you want to be the person who has made both the personal contacts and done the media outreach.

In addition to utilizing the media for positive and proactive reasons, there may be times during your advocacy efforts when you have exhausted most of the traditional means of communicating with elected officials directly. Appropriate use of media tools can provide another vehicle for getting your point across, delivering a clear message, and holding your elected officials accountable.

Important note: Enormous attention is paid by Members and their staff to the local media outlets back home such as the town newspaper. As a health policy advocate, this is where you should focus your media advocacy efforts instead of large national papers.

Most of us are media consumers. To utilize the media for health policy purposes, you need to change your perspective from a consumer to an influencer and a participant in the media. Dealing with the media can be daunting. There are many types of media with different rules and protocols for engaging them. The following tips focus on methods to reach the media to bolster your ability to influence elected officials.

1. **View the media as an opportunity.** All newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and online news services need content. There will be times that you can provide relevant, important information to the media that will benefit ARN. Local media are always on the lookout for local stories. You can be a resource for them.
2. **Look Beyond the Headlines.** You do not need front page articles or a segment on the local news to have an impact. Letters to the Editor are read by Members of Congress and their staff. Be sure not to overlook this important opportunity. Letters must be concise and specific and should include a local angle (e.g. include local/state statistics on the nursing shortage or state specific rehabilitation incidence and mortality data). Each local paper has different rules for submission of Letters to the Editor – typically these guidelines can be

found in the front section of the newspaper on the editorial page or on the online version of the newspaper. Also, some papers have different letters sections in print and online. For most publications, timeliness is a key factor. Time your letter to make it relevant to a recent article or current event if possible.

3. **Use Your Issues as a News Angle.** Legislative activity often will not engender media coverage, but it provides an excellent opportunity to inject your perspective in a letter to the Editor. Some examples include, the introduction of legislation at the federal or state level, when the legislative body considers or takes action on relevant legislation, thanking or asking for co-sponsors or when an elected official has spoken out on an issue of concern. These activities will not necessarily show up in the news, but make great subjects for Letters to the Editor. Members appreciate and enjoy being thanked publicly for taking action that pleases their constituents. The corollary also is true – when a member is publicly “called out” for lack of support or a position contrary to a vocal constituent, it often elicits a response and attention from the office that the constituent might not have been otherwise able to generate through traditional advocacy tactics. Again, timeliness is a key factor.
4. **In any interaction with the media, remember, you are the expert.** You have the facts and the expertise about rehabilitation nursing and know what it takes to provide quality rehabilitation care. Tell your story in a clear, concise, and honest way – just the way you speak with your patients and their family members. Be respectful of their profession as well. Be aware of their deadlines. Understand that you may need to educate members of the media about basic facts, too. Be patient.
5. **When initiating contact with the media, determine the appropriate spokesperson.** Sometimes you will be the appropriate spokesperson but other issues may need to be referred to another professional. Sometimes, it will help to have the national perspective and you may wish to reach out to ARN’s headquarters or the ARN’s Health Policy Associates.
6. **Be professional, concise and prepared.** Many of the same standards you use for contacting legislators also apply to the media. In any interaction with the media, the most important rule is to tell the truth and provide facts. It is okay to say “I don’t know, but I will find out.” Then, be sure to follow-up in a timely fashion.
7. **Monitor your Member’s media appearances and respond appropriately.** If s/he is doing a call in show or an online interview, call or send questions. If you like something you heard during an interview, voicing your pleasure in a letter to the Editor is a perfect way to follow-up and express support.
8. **Create media opportunities,** like press conferences, when appropriate. Take advantage of situations (such as a Member’s Town Hall Meeting) where the media is present to introduce yourself. Consider whether events you are organizing or attending (e.g. ARN Chapter Annual Meeting, Town Hall Meeting) warrant media coverage.*

* For more information about how to utilize Town Hall Meetings, see Chapter 13 in this tool kit.

9. **Create a local media directory.** Get to know the reporters who cover ARN-related issues (health care beat, political). Make yourself a source for them.
10. **Use Professional Materials.** Contact the ARN Communications Department at the national office for talking points, messaging and other questions about interacting with the media.

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