



Tuberculosis and the Media: The Importance of Communicating Messages with Partners

- Planning is the key to a successful tuberculosis (TB) communication program or activity.
- Choose a format for contact with the media that best fits your audience and message.
- Identify the SOCO (“single overriding communication objective”) that you want your audience to remember.
- Identify and train a spokesperson to represent your program to the media.

The media is highly influential and can quickly reach a large number of people, including decision makers. This communication channel can enhance your public image while building support for your tuberculosis (TB) program efforts. The media, however, can also be sensationalistic, circulate inaccurate and incomplete information, and present messages that may damage your image and limit your outcomes. Planning is the key to a successful TB communication program or activity, including working with the media.

Develop a Media Plan

A media plan will help guide your TB communication efforts so that you develop, test, and clear, prior to dissemination, communication goals and key messages. A media plan should outline procedural steps in your organization for working with the media. If available, your public affairs/communication officer can guide you in the development of a plan. A media plan should include the following information:

- Procedures for approving and clearing messages
- TB communication goals and key messages that have been developed with key partners
- Formats for accessing the media
- Information about the spokesperson(s), including tips and strategies for speaking with the media
- Specific reporters to target, including contact information
- Evaluation plan to assess effectiveness of the TB communication activity

Common Formats for Accessing the Media

There are various formats for contact with the media. Choose formats that best fit your message and audience.

- *Press briefings and conferences* – help establish positive relationships with journalists while providing them with important background information on TB. Appropriate when you have national or international TB experts or celebrities visiting your area or to break important news (for example, to release an area’s annual TB statistics or to announce a TB outbreak in your area).
- *Media advisories* – written announcements of upcoming press briefings, press conferences, and public events. All media advisories should include a contact person, a headline title, and logistical information about the future event. That is, describe the “five W’s”: what, when, where, who, and why.
- *Press releases* – contain breaking TB news that media outlets can develop into print and broadcast news stories.
- *Media interviews (television, radio, print, and Internet)* – occur in a variety of settings and may involve talk-show formats, brief sound bites used by journalists, or extensive interviews.
- *Feature stories* – provide in-depth information, often from a human-interest perspective.
- *Letters to the editor* – newspapers and magazines usually dedicate space to letters expressing reader’s viewpoints about the publication’s content and editorial positions.
- *Meetings with editorial boards* – request a meeting when you are trying to have the outlet establish or change its position on a TB health policy issue or increase or change the amount of its TB coverage.



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Communication Goals and Key Messages

To ensure you have a unified and effective message that your audience and the media understand, use the SOCO ("single overriding communication objective") approach.

- The SOCO is the key point or objective of the message that needs to be conveyed. Above all else, what do you want the public to remember?
- List three to four TB facts or statistics that you would like the public to remember.
- Identify a primary and secondary audience. The primary audience is the main audience that you want to reach. Secondary audiences are people who influence the behaviors of the primary audience.
- Include your contact information in case the media needs additional information.

Identify a Spokesperson

The spokesperson represents your communication program or activity to the media.

- The spokesperson offers information and credibility.
- The spokesperson should receive media training to learn how to stay on message, handle difficult questions, and present a positive image for your TB program.

Tips for Working With the Media

- Plan in advance. Do not appear unprepared when asked questions that you should be able to answer.
- Reporters have deadlines. If possible, honor those deadlines.
- Do not have mixed or conflicting messages from multiple TB experts.
- Do not be late disseminating information releases.
- Have a "reality check" on recommendations. Ensure that they are feasible and realistic.
- Do not allow public power struggles and confusion. Work with partners to develop a united approach.
- Keep in mind that reporters have their own agendas. Do not allow them to get you angry or off your message.

Assess the Effectiveness of the Communication Activity

- Use evaluation to refine your TB communication strategy and improve your effectiveness.

Lessons Learned

- Work with partners to ensure unity on communication efforts.
- Do not be afraid of the media. Be proactive and work consistently with respected media before a TB crisis occurs. The role of the media is to inform the public, and they will do so with or without your assistance.
- Stay on message! Planning is the key to a successful TB communication program or activity.
- Recognize that media persons are very diverse, and include both good journalists and sensationalistic journalists.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Forging Partnerships to Eliminate Tuberculosis: A Guide and Toolkit. 2007. <http://www.cdc.gov/TB/pubs/forge/ForgingPartnerships.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication. 2002. <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/erc/leaders.pdf>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials. 2002. <http://www.riskcommunication.samhsa.gov/RiskComm.pdf>

Other technical briefs can be found at: www.maqweb.org/techbriefs/

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