



Media Relations Tips from NHPCO and Caring Connections

National Hospice/Palliative Care Month is an obvious time to reach out to media contacts in your community and help educate others about your work and the value of quality end-of-life care. However, it's important to remember that there are interesting story ideas and important news items occurring all year long. It's important to proactively reach out to the media and respond effectively should they reach out to you.

NHPCO reminds members that building an ongoing relationship with local media takes place over time and requires ongoing commitment. If a professional relationship with local media contacts already exists, you are ahead of the game. Just remember, as with all relationships, it requires ongoing attention.

With that said, NHPCO would like to offer some very basic pointers to assist with media relations in your community.

1. **When communicating with the media focus on the key points.** Keep it simple and clear. There is always more to say about hospice but stick to the discussion of making one's wishes known. Here's an example:

Message: November is National Hospice and Palliative Care Month – an opportunity to inform the community about compassionate care at life's end.

Key Points:

- *Nationally, more than 1.5 million patients were served by hospice last year and our organization served more than XX patients and families in this community.*
 - *We have XX trained volunteers serving others at a very challenging time.*
 - *We are an important, community-wide resource for information about care.*
2. **Emphasize the local angle or hook.** The media are concerned with issues that affect their readers, viewers, or listeners. Explain how your organization is dedicated to helping the entire community. You should be able to clearly answer the question that news editor always ask: *Why should I care?* And to be even more specific: *Why should I care right now?* You are a valuable resource in your area that provides important information to the viewers, readers, and listeners that your media serve.
 3. **There are different types of story ideas you can pitch to your local media.** The media is interested in news items, such as: "Local organization dedicates New Hospice House" or "Local Hospice Celebrates 20th Anniversary." They are also interested in human interest stories that usually look at a specific person's experience, such as: "Hospice Helps Grandmother Live Fully," or "Volunteer Talks about Mission to serve the Dying." If you're able to offer a person willing to share their story, this is very attractive to many media contacts.



4. **Remember that editorial coverage in the media is different from marketing.** If there are multiple hospice providers in the community, you should consider working together to provide information and support to the community at large.
5. **Have your press release or story pitch prepared before you contact the media.** Remember, NHPCO offers suggested documents for member's use.
6. **An up-to-date fact sheet is another important tool to provide in addition to your release or suggested article.** This allows you to provide additional information about hospice, your organization, or the current issue without blurring the focus.
7. **Offer your organization as source of further information.** Or you can suggest Caring Connections at www.caringinfo.org or www.momentsoflife.org as sources for more information on the subject.

Some Do's and Don'ts to keep in mind:

- **DO** prepare carefully before contacting the media – know what you want to communicate and have a set of “talking points” written down. (Remember, NHPCO offers key talking points about this issue.)
- **DO** think about the questions your media might ask, and have answers prepared in advance – this can help you be more at ease.
- **DO** ask them if you've caught them at a time when they have a minute to talk. (You never know what deadline they may be working on and they will appreciate your consideration by asking if they can speak now.)
- **DO** keep your messages simple and focused.
- **DO** remember that reporters cover a wide range of issues and might not recognize the importance of this story – you may need to explain why this is important.
- **DON'T** speak “off the record.”
- **DON'T** overestimate or underestimate the reporter's knowledge.
- **DON'T** use industry jargon and acronyms without explaining them.
- **DON'T** mislead reporters with false information.
- **DON'T** answer a question with “no comment.” There's always a way to refocus on one of your key talking points.



General Interview Tips

Newspaper:

- Make sure that what you tell the reporter is what you want to see in print. If you are unhappy with the way you have phrased something, stop and rephrase or clarify your original statement. If you realize, after the interview, that you misstated a fact or phrased something poorly, call the reporter to correct the error.
- A newspaper reporter will not allow you to review copy before it is printed. You can, however, extend your influence over the article by inviting the reporter to call you for more information or clarification.

Radio/TV:

- Treat your host and the audience as you would friends. Be friendly and responsive.
- Know the length of your interview before you go on. If you have only a brief interview, condense your answers, citing your main points quickly. Think in terms of outline rather than exposition.
- Before the interview begins, try to learn something about your host's likes, interests, and prejudices. This helps you involve him/her more personally in your conversation.
- Don't think of your host as an adversary. With rare exception, he/she will want you to look good so that he/she looks good. Relax, but stay mentally alert.
- It's perfectly all right to consult notes during the course of the radio interview. Put them on index cards - sheets of paper rustled near a microphone sound like a barn fire.
- Radio interviews can sometimes be casual to the point of the host forgetting to tell you that you are on the air. As soon as you are seated in front of a microphone, ask when the interview will actually begin.
- On television, look your interviewer in the eye and call him/her by his/her first name, unless he/she is much older than you. Ignore the technicians on the set and look at the camera only when you want to drive home a special point directly to audience.
- Defensive body language like wringing hands, folding arms across the chest, clenching fists, or narrowing eyes should be avoided. Gesture naturally, and vary your gestures.
- If makeup is offered, use it.
- Ask if a recording of the interview will be posted on the station's Web site, or if you can get a copy for your organization's media files.