Communicating with the Media about Research

Rob Holliday
UNC-Chapel Hill News Services

Jennifer James
UNC Health Care/School of Medicine News Office

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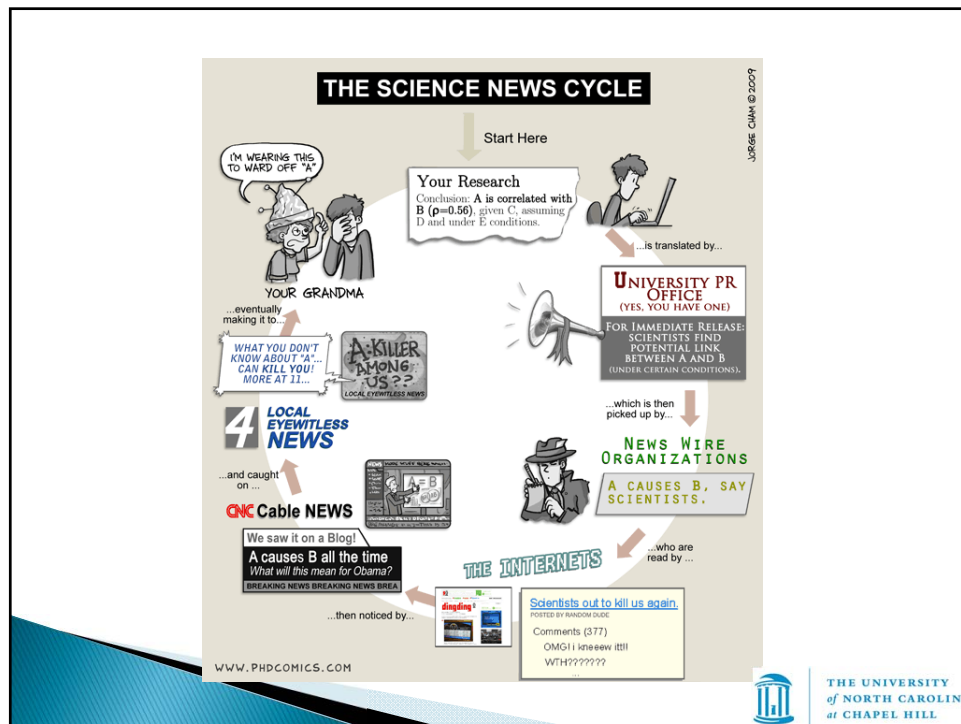
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Objectives and Agenda

In this presentation we will review:

- When and Why to Communicate

- What is News... and What is Not

- Talking with Reporters

- Interview Best Practices

- Resources at Carolina

- Tactics to Share News

- Your Job as a Researcher

- The Research Timeline

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Talk to the media? Why Bother?

You can…

- Reach a large audience, from all walks of life, credibly

- Share your findings with the public and other researchers in your field

- Help make certain the media get the story right and that general public understands your work

- Generate more $ support for similar research

- Establish a reputation as a 'go-to' source in your field

- Make a difference

What's Newsworthy?

A story is more likely to be covered if it includes…
- Information that keeps people and their families safe

- Research that challenges old assumptions – surprising, unexpected or counterintuitive

- Connections to what's already in the news

- A finding that affects large groups of people

- Controversy/conflict/tension/drama

- Something that is the "first", "biggest" or "most comprehensive"

- 'Real' people

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What's Not?

Reporters are likely to take a pass on stories like these…
- Individual grants and fellowships

- Book releases…most of the time, anyway

- Groundbreakings, ribbon cuttings, etc.

- Most academic awards or honors

- 'Down in the weeds' findings

- Conferences

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What gets covered from Carolina?

- Joseph Piven – Autism studies and research

- Charles Kurzman – annual survey of American terrorism

- Margaret Gourlay – bone density screening recommendations

- Gordon Gauchat – conservatives' faith in science

- Myron Cohen – HIV breakthrough

- Zeynep Tufekci – social media, Arab spring

- Ferrel Guillory – political analysis

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Diane Sawyer's on line 1…

What to do when a reporter calls:
- Don't begin answering the questions immediately

- Do RESPOND immediately, though

- Ask about: media outlet, story topic and focus, a couple of possible questions, the reporter's deadline

- Ask about the type of interview: phone, in-person, on-camera, recorded, live?

- Let us know and let us help – UNC News Services/Medical Center News Office

- Prepare, prepare, prepare

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Interview Rules of the Road

YOU'RE the expert...the reporter is calling YOU, after all

‣ Be yourself and have fun...or at least try to

‣ Give simple, direct answers in plain English – would your neighbor understand you?

‣ No 'no comment'

‣ No such thing as 'off the record'

‣ Focus on three major points you want to make. Be able to express each one in two-three sentences / 20-30 secs

‣ Anticipate the tough/controversial questions and practice your responses in advance

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Interview Rules of the Road

‣ Expect to be asked the same question 2-3 times

‣ Short anecdotes and examples are OK

‣ Put the 'human face' on your findings

‣ Rephrase part of the question in your answer

‣ Offer to answer any follow-up questions, provide additional background info

‣ OK to ask when story will run

‣ NOT OK to ask to see it before it runs

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Resources at Carolina

▸ Unit communications personnel

▸ UNC News Services and UNC Health Care News Office
- Publicizing
- Advice
- Training
- Carolina in the News
- Carolina News Studio

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Studio? Really?

▸ Television cameras
▸ Satellite connections
▸ ISDN
▸ On-camera training
▸ Parking spot

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How We Share the News

- News release

- Expert lists/outreach

- Direct pitches to reporters

- Videos and multimedia features

- UNC Health Care News Room

- Social media – Twitter, Facebook

- Internal channels and audiences

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Your Job as a Researcher
(It's More than Just Doing the Research)

- Share your paper as soon as it's been accepted for publication

- Keep 'what's news' in mind

- Be prepared to discuss the key findings and work with us on the development of messages

- Make time to review press release or other materials we develop

- Make time for interviews

- Communicate with us along the way

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Your Research: A Timeline

‣ Share your paper as soon as it's been accepted for publication

‣ Keep 'what's news' in mind

‣ One-month notice
  · Prepare message points, key findings
  · Coordinate with other study authors and journal
  · Create press release
  · Practice for interviews/Q&A sessions
  · Create lists of interested media outlets/reporters
  · Start and interviews BEFORE embargo lifts

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Contact

jjames@unch.unc.edu
919-966-7622

Rob_Holliday@unc.edu
919-843-6322

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Delivering the Message

DO:

- Know to whom you are speaking

- Know your message(s)

- Stick to your agenda

- Make it a conversation/dialogue

- Anticipate difficult questions

- Be in control

Delivering the Message

DON'T:

- Use jargon or acronyms

- Speculate or guess

- Answer questions on areas outside your expertise

- Position your personal platform as that of the Institute

- Argue

- Repeat the negative

- Over-answer

- Comment on rumors

- Say, "no comment"

Bill of Rights

You have the right to:

- Ask about the scope and general direction of the interview.

- Ask who else will be interviewed and included in the story.

- Refer the reporter/ producer to others to whom they may want to speak.

- Have someone with you during the interview.

- Set the length of interview and stick to it.

- Steer and direct the interview and to otherwise get your messages across.

- Correct factual errors after a story appears (even if it's just an email to the reporter for the record).

How to Avoid the "No Comment"

Never say "no comment" or "I can't comment on that." Instead, try one of the following:

- "I learned a long time ago never to speculate on such matters. However it is appropriate to note that..."

- "There simply isn't enough information available at this time to answer that, but we believe..."

- "Those studies are not complete, so it wouldn't be appropriate for me to respond at this time. What we do know..."

- "Several analysts have commented on that and the prevailing view seems to be (cite expert opinion)..."

- "While I can't predict if history will repeat itself, historically (fill in the blank) has happened..."