



Public Awareness Campaign In A Box

Meeting the Media: A How-To-Guide for Community Action

Introduction

Raising awareness of mood disorders and battling stigma is a priority for the Mood Disorders Association of Ontario. Our rationale: the better mood disorders- depression and bipolar disorder – are understood, the better the chances are that individuals facing the challenges of these illnesses will seek and receive appropriate treatment.

Last year, MDAO launched an unprecedented public awareness campaign on the web – “Check Up From the Neck Up”. With the support of our sponsors and the pro bono services of many talented people, MDAO developed an innovative web based mental health resource that encourages people to check out their mental health. With an easy to use depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety screen, Checkupfromtheneckup.ca is a confidential way to assess your mental health. The site has links to resources across Ontario. We are confident that people all over Ontario will be logging on and “checking in”!

To make it easy for your group to promote Check Up From the Neck Up in your local community, we have created this guide to Meeting the Media.

Why Undertake a Public Awareness Campaign?

The answer is really quite simple: to get the story – in this case the story of mood disorders and the importance of checking your mental health as regularly as you check your physical health - credibly, and interestingly conveyed. Reporters cover stories based on the way information is provided by the source. It is often the initial contact, and not the content, that determines how the story is covered by the media. Proactive public relations help ensure initial media contact is positive. By being prepared and organized at the outset, you can educate the public, and raise awareness, in the most direct way possible. And in the end, both you and the reporter perform a public service because your information is conveyed clearly, leaving less room for misunderstanding.

Different Kinds of Audiences

Daily Media (print and broadcast)

The media is the primary target audience referred to in this guide but the principles outlined just as easily apply to donors, health professionals and others in your community. Editorial content helps to shape public opinion and because of this is valued more highly than advertising space. A three quarter page article, for example, is said to be worth three to seven times more than the equivalent ad space.

Daily media by its very nature is current and the stories covered can change by the minute. You may have prepared an interview or story with a newspaper journalist only to find that it does not appear in the next day's or week's paper. Don't give up. Often, a journalist will wait for an appropriate news item to come up that ties in with your story. If you can provide that story, all the better. Be alert to current news item and how they relate to the issue of mood disorders in your community or around the country.

Magazines/Journals

There are many kinds of media that fit in this category including, trade publications, professional journals, web-based vehicles and E-zines. Remember that many of these types of publications have a two to three month lead time. Check the editorial calendars of these publications to plan your best approach. Try to tailor your story to each type of publication, and where possible, give the story a local or regional angle, making it more attractive to each publication's audience. Try to have a spokesperson available in the community where the publication is distributed.

Opinion Leaders

It is important to keep the opinion leaders in your community informed of your campaign and its goals. This not only helps to build your relationship with community leaders but also keeps them informed of your key messages so that they are prepared to speak on your behalf to the media.

Government:

It is courteous and in your best interest to keep relevant contacts with local government and funders. Be sure to send copies of your press materials to these individuals.

Getting Started

Developing a Media List

You probably have the names and phone numbers of local journalists in your data base but it is important to organize this information and expand the list as much as possible.

Check your local, regional, and national papers for the names of reporters that write about your issue. Remember, sometimes the financial writer will do a story about mental illness in the workplace, or the cost of disability in the workplace. Be alert to non-conventional publications or newspaper sections for your story. You can also call the editorial desk of these papers and ask who covers what topics. When you call the various papers, be sure to ask how the newsroom prefers to receive information – by fax, email, or phone. Reporters' assignments can change, so update your lists every 6 months.

Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups aligned with your issue can be very helpful and influential. Often, representatives of these groups are contacted by the media to provide an independent opinion. Create an up to date list of the groups that are active in your community and share your information with them.

Identifying and Training Spokespeople

Spokespeople convey messages and offer insights and perspectives on a given issue, in this case, mood disorders. Ideal spokespeople for this campaign include: Consumer/survivors, family members, psychiatrists, community-based mental health professionals, and physicians, local employers. Spokespersons should receive all media materials and be comfortable with key messages and the interview process.

The Successful Interview

Preparation

- Where possible, avoid doing the interview right away
- When called, tell the journalist you are busy at the moment but would be pleased to call back in 10 minutes
- Use the time to prepare your key messages
- If confronted in person, use the same approach
- Politely ask as many questions of the journalist as you can to help you prepare

Questions to ask:

- What is the purpose/angle of your story?
- What is the deadline?
- When will it be published/aired?
- Who is your audience?
- Is it live or taped?
- How long will the interview last?
- Who else is being interviewed?
- When you have the information, prepare and practice your key messages. Then get back to the journalist at the agreed time.

Interview Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Refer to your organization by name
- Return to your key messages
- Let the situation dictate your demeanor
- Admit when you don't know the answer
- Correct misinformation and false premises
- Listen carefully to the question and speak slowly
- Focus on the interview
- Be professional

Don't:

- Say "off the record" or "no comment"
- Let your guard down
- Be overly friendly or chummy
- Repeat a negative – counter with a positive
- Be intimidated or lose your temper
- Make aside comments
- Say "ah" or "um"
- Use jargon, technological language or acronyms
- Interrupt the interviewer
- Speculate on anything – stick to what you know

Taking Control

Turn a negative into a positive by bridging with a comment such as:

- "The most important point you raise is..."
- "What's important here is..."
- "The big picture is..."
- "My main concern is..."
- "The real issue is..."

Remember, each media interview is your platform to get across your key messages. Maximize your opportunities by remembering these tips.

Learning Key Messages

Your key messages are the three or four points that most concisely convey your message. Keep these key messages simple and to the point. It is often helpful to have them printed and in front of you (or your spokesperson) during an interview.

The All-Important Key Messages

The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario suggests the following key messages for the Check Up From the Neck Up Campaign

Mood disorders are treatable

Checking your mental health is a vital part of routine health care

Check Up From the Neck Up is a friendly, up-beat web site packed with valuable information

[insert the name of your group here](#) offers valuable resources and support for people affected by mood disorders.

[Insert the name of your group here](#) is prepared to share information and resources about mood disorders in various forums in the communtiy – schools, workplace, etc.