

Guide to conducting media interviews

Part 1. Background

2. How your organisation can prepare

When a journalist or researcher for a radio or television programme is looking for the perspective of people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) or an opinion on an issue affecting people with RMDs, they could come to your organisation.

Background information

It is important to be prepared for enquires and questions from journalists and broadcasters. Whether your organisation is planning to approach a journalist to 'sell-in' a story (PROactive media engagement), or to be prepared for an unexpected call from a journalist (REactive media engagement), it is wise to have background information ready prepared. This should be concise and regularly reviewed and updated to ensure it is accurate, informative and still relevant, especially if there is anything controversial upcoming or in the news. Background information could include:

- Facts and figures, such as the number of people affected by RMDs in your country and any health economic data
- An explanation of RMDs and their impact
- Information on your organisation and the type of services you offer
- Short biographies of your key personnel / your designated media spokespeople
- Case studies based on people with inspiring stories to tell or whose stories illustrate key issues you want to raise

- Fact sheets
- Images or any relevant video footage – unedited footage (B-roll) can be very useful, as some programmes like to use this to cut into their own stories
- Any relevant materials produced by your organisation or other respected organisations that support your perspective

You can also prepare materials for use within your organisation, but not for external distribution. These will help you respond to journalist enquiries and ensure that all your media spokespeople have access to agreed key messages and that the information coming from your organisation is consistent. These materials can include:

- Agreed key messages about your organisation and any campaigns, or controversial issues etc
- A Question and Answer (Q&A) sheet [**download a sample Q&A here**](#)

To be fully prepared, consider how your organisation would answer the questions you would least like to be asked



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You can also prepare **statements or comments on key or controversial topics**. These can be on behalf of your organisation in general, or accredited statements from your CEO, medical director or members of your trustees etc. (Ensure these are signed off by the person who is accredited and regularly reviewed and updated).

The key messages and agreed answers you prepare should be shared with staff designated to speak to the media. Please ensure they are all familiar with the key messages and stick to them! (*See media spokespeople, Media Enquiry Protocol and template Q&A with some suggested questions and answers*).

Background materials should be concise – use bullet points where possible – less is more!

Media spokespeople

It is important to be prepared for enquires and questions from journalists and broadcasters.

Spokespeople should be regularly briefed to ensure there is message consistency. Train them well ahead of any media activity – with a specialist media trainer or by practicing interviews with colleagues. Everyone in your organisation should be made aware that only the designated spokespeople should talk to journalists, know who they are and how they can be contacted. This helps to avoid inappropriate comments made by well-meaning but uninformed members of staff. Organisations can also develop a simple **media protocol** and **Question and Answer (Q&A) document**.



Designated spokespeople representing an organisation should have authority and the knowledge or expertise to speak to the media

Media enquiry protocol

This document should be distributed to all staff who might pick up a call from a journalist, including helpline staff. It tells them how to handle media enquiries and where journalists and broadcast researchers should be directed – see a sample media enquiry protocol [here](#). It is essential that anyone answering phones in your organisation understands how to manage calls from the media.

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Developing key messages

A key message is a strong statement about an organisation's belief about itself or an issue about which the organisation takes a stand.

Key messages must convey - in a few words - the most important points you want to deliver to your target audiences, e.g people with RMDs, the general public, mothers, doctors etc. This could include:

- Facts and figures, why your point is important to your target audience
- What you want them to think, feel, say or do differently as a result of hearing your key message

Try to focus on three key messages per topic / audience and their supporting points

- Keep sentences short and use stand-alone sentences – they reduce the likelihood of being taken out of context
- Repeating key messages in interviews helps ensure that they are heard and remembered

Key Message Tips:

- Stick to your key messaging – keep it CLEAR, CONCISE, COMPLETE and CORRECT
- Use simple words, avoid jargon or buzzwords
- Avoid qualifiers such as “I think,” “I believe,” “I feel,” and “I hope” – it makes the spokesperson sound uncertain
- Be judicious about using the word “but” as it can set the stage for a negative impact, even if the first part of the sentence is positive. It can make the second part sound like an excuse. i.e. “Our government supports initiatives to promote healthy eating and active living, but...”



Developing key messages and the answers to difficult questions is a good way for you and your organisation to consider your position, perspectives and values