

Guidelines for Working with the Media

Reaching out to the media may seem complicated, but with these guidelines you will be able to help raise awareness of mitochondrial disease and to advocate effectively and successfully for increased research funding. Remember that the news media can be a very important avenue in reaching elected officials and educating them about the disease. News reports can help to legitimize an issue for an elected official and make it real to them.

1. Use UMDF as a resource.

Contact UMDF's communications office if you think you might have a good story to tell and are willing to talk to the media – or if you have been contacted by a member of the media. They can help coordinate your efforts with what they are doing on a national level. In addition, they can help you think through your story and develop a local plan of outreach. Once they know you and understand your situation, they may be able to help you:

- Identify media opportunities
- Find reporters
- Arrange interviews
- Identify and connect with experts
- Prepare for interviews

2. Do your homework.

Identify and track media resources in your area.

- There are many different types of health stories that can be written. Some may cover scientific research or advances, while some may cover a legislative battle for more funding, still more may cover disease from a human interest perspective and chronicle the challenges of a particular family.
- Track who covers these different types of stories. You can often utilize the Web to find information about specific reporters. Keep in mind that many reporters are general reporters and cover a wide range of issues including health.
- Visit your local library. They may have the media directories that list reporters, such as *Yellow Book*, *Bacon's*, *Burrelle's*, *Hudson's*, or *Gale's*. Many outlets now list reporters' beats and contact information online as well.
- Develop a list of local media for your uses. The list should include print, television, radio and Web reporters. Remember to include weekly and community newspapers.

3. Understand the media world.

Realize that members of the media are naturally inquisitive. However, they are not experts in scientific research or in mitochondrial disease. When speaking with them, imagine you are speaking with a neighbor who knows nothing about mitochondrial disease or your situation.

Respect deadlines. *Deadline* to a reporter means something quite different than it does in your world. Return all calls promptly—ideally within 15–30 minutes—even if only to acknowledge the call and learn the reporter's deadline.

4. Build your relationship with the media.

- Become a reliable, helpful source of information.
- Use local statistics and stories.
- Know and respect deadlines.
- Be able to translate scientific language into everyday terms.
- Only use facts you can back up.
- Tie national news to a local story and have a local example.
- Help with background information even if your family or UMDf is not going to be highlighted in the story.
- Remember the best way to get into the news is to first get into the reporter's Rolodex.

5. Use various media avenues.

There are various ways that you can reach out to the media. Depending upon the point you are trying to get across and the type of media you are contacting, decide which form of outreach best suits your message and goals. You may decide to discuss an issue one-on-one with a specific reporter, issue a press release, hold a press conference or other type of event, or you may decide that a printed letter to the editor or op-ed (opposite the editorial page) is your best avenue.

6. Tips on talking with reporters.

- Take a few minutes to relax and prepare yourself for the conversation. Plan what you want to say (you may want to practice out loud). Decide on the three main points you want the reporter to remember. Be prepared to answer tough questions and plan your responses to reflect your three main points.
- Remember that what you say can be used by reporters in two ways, as direct quotes or as background. Understand how the reporter is planning to use what you say. Do not say anything that you would not want to see in print.
- When dealing with television stations, materials should be sent to the assignment editor or assignment desk. For radio stations, materials should be sent to either the news director or program director.
- When you contact reporters, introduce yourself and ask if they are on a deadline for another story.
- If they are on a deadline, ask when you can call back and whether or not you can send them some information beforehand via e-mail or fax. Make a note of the date/time agreed upon and be sure to follow up.
- Know the goal of your call. Tell the reporter the purpose of your call early in the conversation. Reporters have very tight deadlines and many will have only a small window of time to speak with you. Do you want the reporter to attend an event? Write a story? Schedule a meeting with you?
- Speak clearly and concisely – be able to explain your main points in two or three brief sentences. Refer to the UMDf messages for help on the most important points.
- Present your conclusion first. Assert the main point of your argument first and then support the statement with facts. Be wary of using buzzwords such as “first,” “breakthrough” and “largest,” as you will be expected to prove it.
- Be sure to give reporters any fact sheet or information that will help them build the story.
- Be honest. If you do not know something that the reporter is asking, do not guess. If you can help them find the information, offer your help. Otherwise let them know that you will try to find the answer to their question and get back to

- them –then be sure to get back to them. You can always refer a reporter to the UMDf communications office for more information.
- When the conversation is complete, thank the reporter for his or her time and give your contact information including your day, evening and cell phone numbers, and e-mail address in case he or she needs to contact you.
 - If a reporter calls, return the call promptly, ideally within 15–30 minutes. You don't want to miss a possible story because you didn't return the reporter's call.

7. Preparing a Media Advisory.

- If you are planning to have an event that you would like the media to cover, sending a media advisory is the best way to let reporters know about it. A sample media advisory is included in this tool kit.
- Remember to include all logistics in your media advisory (who, what, when, where and why) about the event in the opening paragraph.
- Include full contact information for yourself, including your day, evening and cell phone numbers, and e-mail address. Reporters may have additional questions before planning to attend your event.
- Be sure to send your media advisory with enough time for reporters to schedule your event. Before 3:00 p.m. and at least two days before your event is the best time to send a reporter your media advisory.
- Follow up with reporters the day before your event so you have some idea of what to expect – remember that many will commit and not show, and some will attend even though they had declined.

8. Preparing a Press Release.

- A sample press release is included in this tool kit.
- Make sure there is news value to your story. A press release should be used to announce significant, unusual, compelling, new or different information or to recap a high-profile event or announcement.
- Remember to include the most important information about the announcement or event in your press release (who, what, when, where and why) in the opening paragraph. Include strong supporting points and quotes in subsequent paragraphs.
- Include full contact information for yourself, including your day, evening and cell phone numbers, and e-mail address. Reporters may have additional questions or wish to speak with a spokesperson.
- Be sure to send your press release with enough time for reporters to actually research and write your story. Be mindful of deadlines. Do not send your press release on Friday at 4:00 p.m.
- Follow up with reporters after sending your press release. Tell them why this should be covered and why it is important to their readers. Be sure to offer additional information or access to a spokesperson for an interview.

9. Holding a press conference.

- *Hold a press conference only when you have news.* They should only be used for significant, unusual, compelling, new or different information, events or the appearance or comments by influential or high-profile individuals.
- Decide on a place for the press conference. Choose a location that will be a strong visual backdrop to get your message across. A playground, hospital, local clinic, local business or the steps of a municipal building are some ideas. Make sure you get permission with enough time to change locations if necessary.

- Set the date and time. Mid-morning on a Tuesday or Wednesday is generally the best time to get media to attend.
- Determine who will speak at the press conference, write it down and post it to the podium (if you decide to have a podium). Make sure all participants know the speaking order before the press conference begins.
- A good press conference is no longer than 30–45 minutes with time for questions. Reporters and camera crews have strict deadlines and must allot time for writing and editing.
- Invite VIP guests early. It's important they have your press conference on their calendar with enough time to reschedule other appointments.
- Decide what pictures, or visuals, will best convey your findings. Giant posters, photos and easy-to-read charts and graphs can be compelling. If there is television coverage, backgrounds for banners or posters should not be white.
- Prepare a media advisory and e-mail or fax it to reporters on your media list at least 3 days before your event.
- The day before your press conference, follow up with a reminder e-mail or fax and call the reporters on your list to remind them and confirm their attendance.
- Assemble press kits or handouts that include any prepared statements that will be read at the press conference (if available prior to the event) and other relevant materials such as fact sheets, etc.
- On the day of the event, make arrangements to leave enough space for television cameras on the sides, or in the back of the room.
- Have all media sign-in at the beginning of the event. Give them a copy of your media kit or handouts.
- Give all attendees an agenda for the press conference that includes key speakers and their titles.
- Start and end your event on time.
- Thank the media and your guests for attending.

10. Track any and all media coverage you receive – and share it.

It is especially important to track and save copies of any media coverage you see on mitochondrial disease. Elected officials may not be looking for this coverage, but you are. You can help draw their attention to it. Sharing copies of the coverage with your elected officials – whether through a letter, e-mail or at an in-person meeting – serves two purposes:

- It draws their attention to the coverage, lets them know this is something the media has been paying attention to, gives them the opportunity to learn more about mitochondrial disease and realize that this is an important issue in their area.
- It shows them that you are informed, this is an important issue to you and that you are paying attention to what happens on it – also that you will be paying attention to what they do where this issue is concerned.

You should also share any coverage you find with the communications office at UMD. They keep track of media coverage on mitochondrial disease and can use these articles/reports as examples for future outreach – both to the media and as a part of their efforts in Washington, D.C.