

Media Outreach

Overview: Media outreach is the structure and process used to deliver the message devised as part of your larger media strategy.

The Three Most Important Things to Remember When Doing Media Outreach

- 1. Remember your audience.** The media is not an end in itself – the media is a tool to magnify your message so your voice can be heard by the audience you are trying to reach. When courting media outlets, you are always looking for outlets that reach your base. Being specific is key – you can't just say "we want to reach everybody." You have to think about what population in your community you most want to reach and build from there. For example, you might want to be getting younger people involved in your group; this means you would want to focus on arts and culture weeklies or web-based publications – media outlets that you know a younger audience are more likely to read or watch.
- 2. Build relationships.** Don't think of media outlets as monoliths. They are comprised of people: reporters, photographers, assignment editors, etc. Take the time to do your research and see what reporters locally, regionally, and nationally are covering single-payer and related issues. Then reach out to them – send them emails when they write articles you like or leave them appreciative voicemails. If you're not sure when to send reporters a press release: ASK. They will appreciate you respecting their time and needs. And always follow up. Be sure to make contact with every reporter at your event, get their business cards, and thank them for coming. And remember that communication works two ways – journalists and editors aren't the only ones who get to ask questions. You should also always ask reporters what interests them about a story, what makes them cover an event, and, if they are at your event, ask them what they want the focus of their story to be. These are good ways to ensure that your message will be reported the way you want it to be.
- 3. Don't be intimidated.** Yes, it's important to be prepared when making pitch calls and talking to reporters in person, but it's also okay to say to a journalist "I don't know the answer to that. I will get back to you." Be firm, confident, and succinct in your interactions, but don't ever lie or make things up – this will ruin you and your group's credibility, and destroy the relationship you are trying to build.

Tips For Getting Media Coverage of an Event

- **Timing.** We know that healthcare is a massively important issue, but that doesn't necessarily mean that reporters will see it as news. The word news means exactly that: things which are new. Topics which are current are good news. You can use a hook – such as Medicare's anniversary on July 30 or the Supreme Court decision on the constitutionality of the mandate – as a way to make your issue relevant.
 - Also, to maximize news coverage, you'll want to make sure any events or actions you plan aren't happening at the same time as other big events, holidays, protests, etc.
 - Be thoughtful about the day of the week and the time of day of your event. For example, if you want to try and get on the local evening news broadcast, you should plan your event for morning or early afternoon. Reporters usually have 2-3pm deadlines so it's important to work around their schedules.

- Also, you should be clear about your goals for any action. Many groups want to get as much turnout as possible and so tend to hold rallies and other big public events on Saturdays – but very little activity happens in newsrooms over the weekend. If energizing your group by having a well-attended rally is your first priority, then by all means plan it for a weekend. However, if your priority is to reach new people by getting some good media coverage, you might want to consider sacrificing numbers to do a smaller action in the morning on a weekday.
- **Framing.** All stories are inherently framed to make real life events more accessible and understandable to the masses. However, if you anticipate the frame, you can influence it and make sure it carries your message. For example, a journalist may want to write a story on the “angry protestors” outside of a private insurance company. By interacting with the journalist and identifying this frame, you can influence it by saying, “We’re angry because up to 84,000 people die every year because they don’t have access to proper healthcare. We could solve this problem with a single-payer system. . .”
 - Stories are also the lifeblood of media. Including a personal story that exemplifies any facts or figures you provide will make your message much more compelling to the press.
- **Location.** Just as the day of the week and time of day are important, so too is location. You want to make sure your event takes place somewhere that is easily accessible (i.e. on a heavily trafficked road or near a main public transportation hub). And you want the location of your event to have meaning and be visually representative of the message you are trying to get across – private health insurance companies’ offices, hospitals, federal buildings, and your legislators’ offices are all great places to hold events. But also feel free to be creative and think outside the box.

The Media Outreach Process

One-Two Weeks Before Your Event

- **Make a press list.** Most websites that aggregate contact info for local print, radio, and news outlets have expensive fees associated with them. If you don’t have a press list, your first step should be to reach out to an ally organization (like a local chapter of PNHP or PDA) and see if they will share their list with you. If not, you can create a press list on your own with a bit of legwork. This is a great blog with tips on how to create a press list for free: <http://blog.journalistics.com/2009/free-resources-for-building-media-lists/>.
 - You’ll want to pay special attention to assignment editors and newswire services: assignment editors are generally the people at newspapers and news stations who decide what events and issues to cover, and hand out the assignments to their reporters and journalists; and newswire services (the Associated Press (AP), Getty, and Reuters) sell their stories to hundreds of news outlets. If your story gets picked up by a wire service, you will be able to reach a much broader audience of people.
 - *Remember, once you create a press list, you’ll want to keep careful notes on who attended what event, if reporters were friendly or hostile, what their specific beat is (local issues, health reporter, etc.), and any other important notes.
- **Send a media advisory.** This is a brief piece of writing that covers the 5 Ws of your event and lists at least one person in your group who can be reached to answer any questions. Be sure to include if there will be any good visuals – this is a way to entice photographers and videographers to attend. If possible, you’ll want to email your advisory out a week or a few days

before your event, but, for smaller events, it's okay even it goes out the day before. However, for really big events, it's good to send out an advisory a week before, and then send out another one with a slightly different angle several days later. (***Note: A sample advisory and press release are included at the end of this handout.**)

Day Before Your Event

- **Send a press release.** This is a summary of the event that follows this general format: problem, solution, action. Include quotes from several different people involved in your group; good quotes summarize why the event is important – personal anecdotes are a compelling way to do this.
 - Always include your organization's mission, and the contact info for at least one person in your group who is available to answer any questions.
 - Include a link to your organization's website and links to any other pertinent information.
 - You should aim to keep your release to about one page in length.
 - Release should be emailed out one or two days before an event.
- ***Important notes about releases and advisories:**
 - The subject line of your email should start with the date and time of your event followed by a succinct title that doesn't assume prior knowledge.
 - Don't email attachments – always send your release as the body of your email. If you want to include pictures, include a link to where pictures can be found online.
 - Don't bombard outlets with press releases or you'll develop a bad reputation and get ignored.

Day Of

- **Resend your press release.**
- **Make pitch calls.** These are calls to the media outlets you sent your advisory and release to. Be prepared with a 5 second pitch about what the event is and why they should cover it.
 - Take very good notes! Be prepared to email your release to anyone who needs it or follow up with any other necessary information.
- **Prepare press kits.** These are folders or stapled packets of paper with your latest press release, one or two pages of supplementary information, and links to further info. The packet should be succinct and clear – you don't want to overwhelm a reporter with too much information.
- **Identify press wranglers.** These are people in your organization who are tasked with getting the contact information of any members of the press present, and who connect journalists with spokespeople. It's also a good idea for them to give journalists their emails and phone numbers in case they have any follow up questions at a later time.

Follow Up

- **After-event press release.** Your work isn't done just because the event is over. You'll want to follow up as soon as possible with a press release that describes the event, includes contact information for people available for interviews, and links to any photos and videos you have of the event.
- **Press coverage round-up.** In the days following your event, you'll want to be on the look-out for news clips and print stories about it. A custom Google search using reporters' names, the name of your event, or any keywords is a great place to start. And be sure to add this information to

your press list – knowing what reporters covered your last event is a great place to start when you do media outreach for your next one.

- Also, be sure to send a copy of your press round-up to your members and colleagues. This is a great way to keep people informed about your group and single-payer, and can also encourage people to get involved when they see something is happening.



****SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY****

MEDIA ADVISORY
January 7, 2011

Insider Speaks Out on Health Insurers' Deadly Practices Wendell Potter Addresses Doctors' Group

- Who:** Author/whistleblower **Wendell Potter**, former Cigna communications director, recently named "Most Valuable Author of 2010" by *The Nation* magazine
- What:** Reading, discussion, and book-signing of Potter's new book "**Deadly Spin: An Insurance Company Insider Speaks Out on How Corporate PR Is Killing Health Care and Deceiving Americans**"
- When:** Monday, January 10, 2011; 7:30 pm presentation, 6:00 pm wine reception & signing
- Where:** Murphy Institute, City University of New York, 25 W.43rd St, 18th fl., New York, NY
- Contact:** Oliver Fein, M.D., chair, PNHP-NY Metro, 212-746-4030
Mary O'Brien, M.D., board member, PNHP-NY Metro, 212-854-9842
Laurie Wen, executive director, PNHP-NY Metro, 917-446-1610, laurie@pnhpnymetro.org
www.pnhpnymetro.org

New York, NY — As the debate on health care reform reignites this week in Congress, Wendell Potter, former head of communications at the insurance giant Cigna, continues to expose the deadly practices of the profit-driven health insurance industry.

The industry insider first gained notoriety in 2008 when he left Cigna. Potter has since become a high-profile critic of the deception used by insurance companies to deny health care to Americans. He has testified several times before Congress and has been called "the ideal whistleblower" by *Time* magazine and was recently named "Most Valuable Author" of 2010 by *The Nation* magazine.

Monday's event is organized by the New York Metro chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP.) With 18,000 members across the country, PNHP is the leading doctors' group dedicated to a universal, affordable, and quality health care system in the U.S. It advocates for an improved Medicare-for-all system that is publicly financed and privately delivered.



****SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 10, 2011

Insider Speaks Out on Health Insurers' Deadly Practices Wendell Potter Addresses Doctors' Group Tonight

- Who:** Author/whistleblower **Wendell Potter**, former Cigna communications director, recently named "Most Valuable Author of 2010" by *The Nation* magazine
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Laurie Wen, executive director, PNHP-NY Metro, 917-446-1610,
laurie@pnhpnymetro.org

New York Times' review of "Deadly Spin":
http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/06/health/views/06chen.html?_r=1

High-quality video and photos of the event will be available upon request.

New York, NY — As the debate on health care reform reignites this week in Congress, Wendell Potter, former head of communications at the insurance giant Cigna, continues to expose the deadly practices of the profit-driven health insurance industry.

The industry insider first gained notoriety in 2008 when he left Cigna. Potter has since become a high-profile critic of the deception used by insurance companies to deny health care to Americans. He has testified several times before Congress, becoming a symbol of moral courage to many ordinary Americans who have suffered abuses by the industry. His exposé has revealed their individual experiences to be the designed outcomes of a system built to maximize profit for a few, at the expense of the lives of many. Potter has been called "the ideal whistleblower" by *Time* magazine and was recently named "Most Valuable Author" of 2010 by *The Nation* magazine.

Tonight's event is organized by the New York Metro chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP.) With 18,000 members across the country, PNHP is the leading doctors' group dedicated to a universal, affordable, and quality health care system in the U.S. It advocates for improved Medicare for all, a single-payer system that is publicly financed and privately delivered.

In "Deadly Spin," Potter warns of the harmful effects of the "unfettered, invisible hand of the marketplace" in health care. Adds Dr. Oliver Fein, past president of PNHP and chair of the New York Metro chapter, "The lives of my patients should not be in the hands of CEOs. Let's get the profit motive out of health care and put the health of my patients first in an improved Medicare-for-all system."

The movement for a single-payer health care system has been growing for decades, with recent polls showing that 59% of American physicians and a majority of the public prefer such a system. Support has not waned since the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). In fact, dissatisfaction with the new law has caused a resurgence of media coverage on the single payer issue. On January 7, 2011, both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* published op-eds noting that while this model was not adopted in the new law, it may resurface soon as a viable political option due to public support.

As House Republicans rush to schedule a vote to repeal PPACA, supporters of single payer point out that the real debate needs to go beyond "to repeal or not to repeal." Says Laurie Wen, Executive Director of PNHP-New York Metro, "Mr. Potter's book makes it so clear why neither the current system nor the new law will fix our broken health care system—because they both put trust in the private health insurance industry. If you had trust in that industry before, you won't after you read about how it sent a spy to the funeral of a 17-year-old girl, because her insurance company denied her a liver transplant, and her death caused a public relations nightmare for them."

Ayana Jordan, a medical student and a board member of PNHP-New York Metro, says, "At medical school, they teach us how to save lives. But the realities of our health care system contradict what I'm learning, because for-profit insurance companies hurt patients. Patient health is not their priority. It's my priority, though. I want to practice in a system that treats people like human beings, that's why I want improved Medicare for all."