Interact with journalists and the media

Getting journalists to engage with you can be difficult, but they are key to successful communication and dissemination. Establishing a relationship is crucial to increase the likelihood of getting your story noticed. This guide contains tips to help get you started. If you need more help or an answer to a specific media or press question, please contact pressoffice@cochrane.org.

Tips for building relationships

The key to success is putting in the effort to build a personal connection with journalists. It can be a slow and lengthy process, but worth it in the long run.

- Instead of trying to target lots via a newsletter or email, select a few key influencers who have the potential to make a big impact.
- Do your homework – read previous articles written by them, to learn what makes them tick.
- If they are located near you, offer to meet them in person for a coffee. Face-to-face interaction can be a great way to grow a relationship.
- Alternatively, if meeting in person is not an option, you could arrange a Skype call.
- If you have a Twitter or Facebook account, follow the journalist, re-tweet their tweets, like their posts, acknowledge their work, and tag them if you want to make sure they see something in particular.
- Over time you will learn which subject matter a journalist is interested in, and you can use this knowledge to only send them press releases or Plain Language Summaries that you know they will be interested in.
- If a journalist has questions, make sure you respond to them in a timely manner. Be accessible.

Tips for targeting journalists/media outlets/bloggers

- Give them the top lines/ the ‘juicy’ bits first: it’s about grabbing their attention – ‘what’s in it for me?’
- Only give them the ‘take home’ messages: no journalist will read a Cochrane Review in full.
- Make it timely and topical – why is it interesting to them, in their context, right now?
- Make it easy for them to digest.
- Who might be interested in this and why?
- Is there an ‘expert’ view here they might be interested in? (A great patient/clinician’s story)
- Target your audience: who is best to target – which journalists? What media format is your story best suited for – print press/magazine/academic journal/ broadcast/longer in-depth feature/social media?

Face to face with the media: Tips for talking to journalists

As a local Cochrane group in your region or country, you could be asked to comment on any Cochrane story/piece of evidence – proactively or reactively. This could include:

- New or existing evidence.
- Features – more in-depth pieces, consumer or evidence-focused.
- Editorial or an opinion-editorial piece.
- A general enquiry as a result of a topical news story.

If you are approached to do an interview, ask the journalist/producer what questions will be asked, so that you can refer the interview on if the topics are not within your area of expertise.

If you do plan to speak with a journalist here are a few tips:

- Prepare what you are going to say beforehand – practice on a colleague.
- Take part in some media training, a role-play with the types of questions you will be asked.
- If broadcast media, find out if you are being recorded, live or pre-recorded.
- Stick to the facts.
- Only talk about what you know, linked to the Review or specific evidence.
- Only ever say what you are willing to see written or broadcast.
- Don’t be afraid to say ‘I don’t know the answer to that question, but I can find out’.
- Be honest – Journalists know when you’re not telling the truth.
- Assume everything is ‘on the record’.
- Never say ‘no comment’… there’s no point.