

ISICEM15: Pepe's Pointers for Dealing with the Media



Paul Pepe's 30 years as a public official (now in Dallas, Texas) and emergency medicine physician have given him plenty of experience of dealing with the media. Admitting that at first he tended to shy away from media contact, he said that experience has taught him some golden rules for public speaking and dealing with the media. Speaking at the International Symposium on Intensive Care and Emergency Medicine in Brussels this week, Pepe noted that these rules applied as much to talking to public officials, to the people in the board room as well as to the public. Practise these, he advised. Physicians need to make sure that they are the appropriate person to give these messages, and understand who they are talking to.

Don't bury the headline, but say it and say it again! There are different types of message - the informational message vs the persuasive message. Ask what the opposition is. Acknowledge the doubters and put in the "but". For example, "If we introduce compulsory helmets for children, that takes away free will and adds costs, but ...when I looked into it, I found x and y benefits." Acknowledge that you understand both sides, and then what your conclusion is.

Always tell the truth

Even if you can't tell whole truth, explain why. You need to be able to tell it in a 10 second soundbite. Summaries your point and parting resolve, for example "It's up to all of us to learn CPR." Pepe added, "Be careful where you place your "but". People tend to hear what words come after the "but", so make sure the "but" has the positive message.

Respond quickly and accurately

Even if you're initially in the dark, become a helpful, familiar, accessible resource.

Be human and talk like one, be compassionate, and treat everyone as you would a family member.

Be positive on issues and pessimistic on patients issues

For example, when speaking about a patient, "the condition is serious, but he couldn't be in better hands." It is important to control the interview, by remembering your message and staying on the mark by saying it and saying it again.

Give the glory to others

Make them look good and you'll look good.

Provide a good hook, e.g. simple, valuable lesson e.g. car seat saved a child. Use willing persons as examples - children and animals are the best

Be simple

Give them simple and straightforward graphics, and send these to the media ahead of a briefing so they have the graphics in front of them.

Stay on the mark

Remember the three Rs - repetition, redundancy and reiteration.

Don't trust anyone - assume it will be in print tomorrow. Also there is no such thing as "off the record".

Hope for the mediocre, but expect the worst.

Concluded Pepe, interviews will never meet your expectations, don't take it personally!

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