Publishing Controversial Research

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May 2, 2011
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Annals of Internal Medicine

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This session will discuss how to prepare in advance of publishing controversial topics. In addition, it will give advice on how to manage issues before and after publication. Learn how to:

- prepare in advance of publication
- empower spokespersons
- guide and present the message
- manage issues and potential issues
Some Topics are “Hotter” Than Others
How Do You Know?
Recognizing Controversy

- Controversial topics inspire debate
  - Go against commonly-held assumptions
  - Challenge previous science
- People have clear opinions on one side of the debate or the other
  - Discussions may become heated
  - No or little consensus from the experts
Recent Examples

- Screening Mammography for Women 40 to 49 Years of Age: A Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians (2007)
- USPSTF recommends against routine screening for women under the age of 50 (2010)
Recognize Risks and Benefits

Risks
- Implied endorsement of your organization, members, or journal
- Backlash from the public and your key audiences

Benefits
- Garner branded coverage in top-tier media outlets
- Drive web traffic to journal and social sites
- Increase interest of potential authors
Public Relations Function

- Lead Discussions
- Influence Perception
- Support Org. Identity
- Pitch Strategically
- Manage Messages

Public Relations
Media Relations Objectives

- Garner branded media coverage for journal
- Ensure that behaviors, opinions, and attitudes towards your organization or journal remain positive
- Enhance, maintain credibility for your journal
- Increase public awareness of issue
- Position your journal favorably (or neutrally) to the public
Target Audiences

Journal

Members
Social Media
Authors
Consumers
Leadership
Thought Leaders
Relevant Orgs.
Priority Media
The R.A.P. Approach

Research  Anticipate  Prepare

Media Relations Strategy
Research the Landscape

- Conduct a media audit
- Find out where relevant organizations stand on the issue
- Read existing guidelines or position papers
- Identify key thought leaders at the forefront of the issue
Where to Look for Answers

- Google or other search engine
- Association contacts
- Organization websites and social media pages
- Media/social media analytics sites
- Your members and leadership
Anticipate, Then Adapt

- Recognize that the media can and will ask tough questions
- Expect and plan for high interview volume
- Look for weak spots and knowledge gaps among speakers
- Understand your organization’s current and previous stance on topic
Prepare Materials and Spokespersons

Write Press Materials
- Develop press release and background materials
- Identify media targets/refine media list

Prepare Spokespersons
- Draft talking points and key messages
- Train spokespersons on talking points, bridging, and other interview skills

Execute PR Tactics
- Distribute press materials
- Follow up with high-priority media outlets
- Coordinate interviews and sit in where possible
Case History: ACP’s Mammography Guideline

Screening Mammography for Women 40 to 49 Years of Age: A Clinical Practice Guideline from the American College of Physicians

Published in *Annals of Internal Medicine* on April 3, 2007
Mammography Guideline Broke New Ground

- ACP’s Dr. Amir Qaseem, lead author
- Potential for controversy was evident as breast cancer awareness and advocacy was very high.
- Recommendations broke new ground because they did not advocate definitively for screening before the age of 50.
Planning Began With Careful Research

- Conducted a media audit to identify appropriate reporter contacts
- Dissected articles to ferret out all possible points-of-view
- Researched advocacy orgs to determine where different associations stood on the issue
“We designed our screening mammography guideline based on scientific evidence,” said Lynne Kirk, MD, FACP, President of ACP. “It will empower women between the ages of 40 and 49 to become part of the decision-making process and to encourage them to discuss with their physicians the benefits and risks of mammograms.”

-- Dr. Lynne Kirk
In addition to Dr. Amir Qaseem, the ACP PR Team identified several spokespersons to answer reporter questions about the Guideline.

An arsenal of speakers was necessary to accommodate the expected volume of media interest.

PR Team followed protocol in coordinating interviews.
Trained Spokespersons

- Trained all spokespersons on how to deliver key messages
- Helped them learn how to keep answers brief
- Taught important bridging techniques
- Provided tips on how to answer antagonistic or negative questions
- Briefed them on interview protocol for the week of release
Q. Why is ACP is taking a position that differs from accepted and established norms?

Q. Critics say that your guidelines may prevent or discourage some women between age 40 and 49 from getting mammography screening and thus might allow some breast cancers to grow that might otherwise have been discovered. Why are you encouraging this risk?

ACP Recommendations Mammography Screening Women Ages 40 to 49

Q. Why did you choose this topic to develop a guideline?
- Did you survey members or have a vote that this was an important topic for practicing internists?
- Have your members indicated that this is an area that there patients raise often?

A. The American College of Physicians had been developing guidelines since 1981. We have traditionally been interested in areas where evidence is equivocal, because these are the areas that are toughest for the physician to advise patients and choose therapies. Mammography for women between ages 40 to 49 is one issue where the evidence for annual screening is less concrete than for other age groups, so we decided to tackle this issue. Evidence is much stronger for women between 50 to 59.

Q. How did you develop your guidelines?

A. The guidelines were developed by our CEAS committee, as they felt that the benefit of screening between ages 40-49 was not as clear as in other age groups. The committee felt that this information would be important to our members.

The College appoints committee members who are experts in their clinical areas. These are internists with expertise in primary care, health care administration, and medical and health services research to provide advice, assistance, and direction in the development and implementation of College guidelines. The group makes recommendations regarding:
New Guideline for Screening Mammography for Women 40 to 49 Years of Age

Recommendations encourage women to become part of the decision-making process.

PHILADELPHIA, April 3, 2007 - The American College of Physicians (ACP) today released a new clinical practice guideline for screening mammography for women 40 to 49 years of age. The guideline, a background article, an editorial, and a patient summary appear in today's issue of Annals of Internal Medicine, published by ACP.

ACP developed the guideline to present the available evidence for screening mammography to physicians and women between the ages of 40 and 49 and to increase their understanding of the benefits and risks of screening mammography in women within this age group.

“We designed our screening mammography guideline based on scientific evidence,” said Lynne Kirk, MD, FACP, President of ACP. “It will empower women between the ages of 40 and 49 to become part of the decision-making process and to encourage them to discuss with their physicians the benefits and risks of mammograms.”
Proactively Pitched Story to Top-Tier Media

- Distributed press release over newswire
- Sent direct e-mails to more than 650 reporters
- Made follow up phone calls to top-tier outlets
Re-Active Media Relations

- Triaged media interviews
- Screened reporters to determine story angle in order to help prepare spokespersons
- Determined which interviews to take and which ones to decline (if any)
- Attended/listened in on interviews for speaker comfort and to provide support
- Followed up to provide reporters with anything else needed to complete story and meet deadline
Challenges

- The ACS reached out to reporters with its reaction to ACP guideline
  - Posted message on Dr. Len’s Cancer Blog
  - Released a statement from Dr. Arnold Baskies, Board Member for ACS Eastern Division

Mammograms Still Count For Women In Their 40s

By Dr. Len
April 04, 2007

I returned from vacation this past Monday to a slew of headlines and media commentary about newly released guidelines from the American College of Physicians suggesting that women in their 40’s should reconsider the routine recommendation for screening mammograms in that age group.

I'm not sure if you are planning on covering the new American College of Physicians guidelines on mammography - with which we disagree strongly - but I wanted to share this with you in the event you are doing something. We are very concerned this will lead to an even greater decline in the number of women getting annual screenings - an alarming and potentially deadly trend. I'm happy to get you a doc, survivor...

American Cancer Society board member Dr. Arnold Baskies blasted the report, calling it "a step backward."
Media Coverage Was Balanced

Due to preparation and outreach, coverage included statements from ACS, ACP, and other organizations, giving a balanced view of the story.
Ripped From the Headlines

The guidelines boil down to this: Women in their 40s should work with their doctors to gauge their personal breast cancer risk and to decide whether to get mammography to screen for breast cancer.

Reopening a long-running debate, the American College of Physicians, issued new guidelines today that instead urge women in their 40s to consult with their doctors about whether to have the breast X-rays.

Dr. Lynne Kirk, president of the ACP, says her group's recommendation results from its survey of the evidence about the effectiveness of mammograms for younger women. That's why the ACP urges doctors to discuss the test with their younger patients and let the women choose whether they want to move ahead.
Qualitative Media Analysis

- 65 percent presented balanced coverage
- Nearly 10 stories had a positive tone
- A few stories had a slightly negative tone
- Only a handful of stories were overtly negative
Quantitative Media Analysis

- More than 200 print, television, radio, and online stories
- Reached an audience of nearly 117 million
Quantitative Media Results