

PUBLIC RELATIONS

This public relations (PR) guide details the many ways you can raise awareness of events, promote chapter activities, or get media attention for your chapter. These tactics can be used if your chapter has PR experience or if you are just beginning. PR will help you attain your goals and is important to all chapters, regardless of the size, shape or location.

PR is AMSA's lifeblood. Without public knowledge of what AMSA is doing, how we are affecting change and what benefits AMSA offers medical students, AMSA would not be an active and vital force in medical education. PR provides this information.

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PR—WHAT WILL IT DO FOR MY CHAPTER?

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The main objectives of AMSA's PR program are to:

- Increase awareness of AMSA among your classmates, campus population and surrounding community;
- Increase AMSA student participation;
- Inform students about AMSA events, activities and opportunities; and
- Increase AMSA membership.

Publicizing an event or just want to get the word out about your chapter? Here are some practical PR tips:

- Display AMSA posters throughout the student lounge or in busy hallways.
- Put reminders about upcoming activities in students' boxes or on their doors, and in hallways.
- Present general information to students over a Web page, on e-mail or through your school newspaper.
- Post the following on a bulletin board or cafeteria doors:
 - Blurbs on AMSA's political advocacy and public actions.
 - Posters for upcoming regional or national conferences.
 - Informational statements, that you receive regularly, from AMSA leadership
 - Pictures of AMSA student activities.
 - Details about opportunities available through AMSA.
- Try a more subtle approach with teasers. On one day, stuff student boxes with a note saying, "Which was the only medical student organization willing to risk it all in order to get the Match changed to be more student-favorable?" The next day, distribute note #2, which explains AMSA's role.
- Place any of the information below in a school newsletter or newspaper:
 - Tidbits about AMSA meetings, agendas, political issues and activities.
 - Pictures, poems, biographical sketches about AMSA leadership.
 - Paragraphs about AMSA activities on the national and local levels, such as upcoming AMSA Academy events.
 - Sound bites about leadership positions or local grant projects.
 - Calendar reminders of activities, meetings and conferences.
- Have every AMSA member wear an AMSA T-shirt on the same day.
 - Sell T-shirts, baseball caps and pens AND publicize AMSA. Visit AMSA's Resource Center at www.amsa.org/resource/index.cfm.
- Integrate your AMSA chapter into your medical school.
 - Assist other groups in community service projects, put on educational events (e.g., health policy lunches, preventive health programs, etc.) or host social events.

GETTING IN THE NEWS

What is the goal of obtaining media coverage?

AMSA offers abundant media opportunities. Whether it's about a medical school chapter reaching out to its local community or AMSA's involvement in a legislative issue, AMSA has many success stories. Working with the media to generate coverage is a key strategy in informing the community about its local AMSA chapter. By identifying your chapter's positive aspects and getting the word out, you can:

- Recruit members and sponsors.
- Educate the public about AMSA initiatives.
- Highlight AMSA activities that are making a difference in your community.

Human interest angle—Reporters are more likely to emphasize the human-interest angle when covering stories. Since people always make for interesting news, define your AMSA initiative through the people involved in it.

Medical students, premeds, residents and interns, physicians, other community activists—virtually every AMSA member—all present stories that have a tremendous emotional appeal. It's about future physicians taking active roles in their education and their communities.

Key audiences

Remember that the audience you're trying to reach with your message is not the reporter, but their readers and/or viewers. When dealing with the media, it is vital to identify your target audience and tailor your message for them.

HOW THE MEDIA WORKS

What is news?

Every day, organizations such as AMSA participate in events and activities that could be covered by the media. But only a few stories make the 6 o'clock news or the front page. Usually, the organizations that get media coverage are the ones that look for angles that fit the media's need for news. **Several characteristics can make information newsworthy:**

- Proper timing
- A local angle
- Widespread interest
- Well-known people
- Human interest/emotional appeal

News hooks

With some creative thinking, you'll have a better chance of story placement. What is important to each of your audiences? Where do they get their information? How can you get their attention? Now, think about developing a "hook"—a few words that clarify what's important about your story—that will convince the media that your story is worth covering. **The following are examples of news hooks:**

- Present a local angle to breaking news of interest.
- Present an education or community service award.
- Tie into a well-known day or week (e.g., National Primary Care Week, National Doctors' Day).

- Explain the local implications of national education reports and surveys.
- Arrange for testimonials or guest speakers before appropriate groups and meetings.
- Arrange for tours of medical schools/facilities.
- Involve the media as a partner in an AMSA community project.
- Tie into previous stories covered by the media.
- Link AMSA with another publicity event (e.g., a local career fair).
- Tie in with education trends or feature stories that newspapers are covering.

A local angle

Have you ever heard the adage “All news is local”? It means the media in your community wants news that affects their audiences. If a story breaking on the national level has a local impact, contact the local media outlets and offer an interview or up-to-date information for their stories. Giving a reporter a local angle on the story will always increase your chances of placement.

PLAN TO REACH THE MEDIA

A media plan

Before you go to the press with a story, you need to be sure you have the strongest possible message. Start by defining your message and planning a strategy to promote it. Your media plan should answer three basic questions:

- What do we want to accomplish? (Goals)
- How do we accomplish it? (Strategy)
- When do we accomplish it? (Timing)

Next, you should develop a timetable to address factors such as the story timeliness and media deadlines.

Compiling a media list

A media list contains carefully selected names, addresses, phone numbers, Web site and e-mail addresses of every news organization, reporter and editor most likely to use the material you send. Your media list should be as accurate and current as possible. The list need not be long, but it is important to keep it up-to-date. Through AMSA’s Legislative Action Center, you can search for your local media contacts quickly and easily: www.capwiz.com/ams/dbq/media/.

Or you can use one of these resources:

- www.gebbieinc.com/index1.htm—This is a good place to start to define your media list.
- www.dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/—One of the most comprehensive directories of online media
- www.prplace.com/mds_guide/index.htm—Click the categories and access major U.S. media.
- www.cjr.org/database/papers.asp—The search engines can find all the newspapers/magazines in a given area
- www.ccmc.org/mediatools.htm - The Communications Consortium Media Center offers great tools and tips for forming a PR plan and how to get the most out of your contacts.

Key contacts

Education and health care reporters and editors are most likely to be interested in stories about AMSA projects, so be sure to send critical information to them as well. Once you have gathered the addresses and phone numbers, call each outlet to confirm the information and determine which editors and reporters are most likely to use your materials. Once you have identified your media contact, start building positive relationships. As with any working relationship, it’s important to establish trust and rapport.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Put the date to emphasize timeliness. Always put a phone number/e-mail where reporters can receive more information.

Headline—keep it simple! (Bold Font).

The subhead (not shown) is used to convey the secondary message.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-October 22, 2009

Media Contact: Kim Cunningham, Director of Public Relations
Phone: (703) 620-6600, ext. 207
E-mail: pr@amsa.org

Thousands of Medical Students Urge Schools to Eliminate Pharmaceutical Marketing Influence

Reston, Va.— Thousands of medical students join together this week, National PharmFree Week, calling upon medical schools to ban pharmaceutical marketing influence from their campuses.

The first paragraph should answer the “who, what, where, when and why” of the event.

National PharmFree Week is sponsored by the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), the nation’s largest, independent medical student organization. Over the course of the week, thousands of future physicians and health care leaders will hold events across the country, including:

Capitol Hill Briefing: AMSA joins the National Physicians’ Alliance and the Prescription Project to lobby on behalf of Senate Bill 2029. The legislation will require disclosure of payments to physicians by the pharmaceutical industry. (Monday, October 22, 2:30 p.m.)

Don’t include everything—the point is to have reporters call for more information. Be concise.

New Policy Announced at UConn: The University of Connecticut Medical Center will announce its new pharmaceutical policy. (Wednesday, October 24, 12 p.m.)

FLIP Symposium: The symposium, being held at the University of Illinois at Chicago, will provide skills to become more critical, evidence-based prescribers. Guest speakers will include several nationally renowned leaders, including *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) Editor in Chief Catherine DeAngelis. (Saturday, October 27, 9 a.m.) About 90 percent of the pharmaceutical industry’s \$21 billion marketing budget is directed at physicians, according to JAMA. There are more than 90,000 pharmaceutical representatives that visit U.S. physicians and medical students, providing free lunches, gifts, marketing paraphernalia and free medication samples. These enticements are designed to influence doctors to prescribe more drugs and more expensive drugs and have often become a substitute for objective medical evidence.

Quote someone from your organization. Use an AMSA title.

“These marketing practices, including the growing number of “ask your doctor” commercials, has led to over-medicating U.S. population,” says Michael Ehlert, M.D., AMSA national president. “There is substantial evidence that marketing shapes physician prescribing habits. By eradicating pharmaceutical marketing from all medical schools, hospitals and academic medical centers, physicians will be able to go back to practicing evidence-based medicine.”

Launched in 2002, AMSA’s PharmFree Campaign teaches medical students how to ethically interact with the pharmaceutical industry. Earlier this year, AMSA released its PharmFree Scorecard, a first-of-its-kind ranking of medical schools according to their pharmaceutical policies. AMSA remains one of the few national organizations to ban all pharmaceutical advertisements and sponsorships. National PharmFree Week is supported by *The Medical Letter*. For more information, visit www.pharmfree.org.

End with background info/Web site.

About the American Medical Student Association

The American Medical Student Association (AMSA), with more than a half-century history of medical student activism, is the oldest and largest independent association of physicians-in-training in the United States. Founded in 1950, AMSA is a student-governed, nonprofit organization committed to representing the concerns of physicians-in-training. With more than 62,000 members, including medical and premedical students, residents and practicing physicians, AMSA is committed to improving medical training as well as advancing the profession of medicine. AMSA focuses on four strategic priorities: advocating for quality, affordable health care for all; global health equity; enriching medicine through diversity; and professional integrity, development and student well-being. To learn more about AMSA, our strategic priorities, or joining the organization, please visit us online at www.amsa.org.

This is AMSA’s boilerplate. It cannot be changed. You can use in your press materials.

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OTHER PR TACTICS

Letter to the Editor

Write a letter to the editor to respond to a story the newspaper has printed on an issue of importance to you. Although readership is not as high as for general news, letters to the editor are well read by decision-makers. Save your opportunities to write a letter for important occasions. Otherwise, your message will lose its impact and be passed over by the editors.

- A letter to the editor should be short (no more than 200 words). The shorter a letter, the more likely it is to get printed.
- Make your most important point in the first or second paragraph.
- If the letter responds to a particular article or another letter, refer to the title, date and author of the original piece in your opening sentence.

Opinion editorials (Op-Eds)

Op-eds are another effective way to express your opinions in the newspaper. A newspaper may accept up to two op-eds per year, depending upon the relevance of your organization or the issue to community events. Op-eds should be:

- Persuasive on an issue or viewpoint.
- Thoughtful and well written.
- Relatively short (500 words is an ideal length).
- Signed by the head of an organization or president of its advisory board when possible.

Media advisory

A media advisory is different than a press release. It is a brief memo to all media alerting them to an **event**.

- The advisory should contain a description of the program, the time, location, participants and a contact name and phone number so that the media can get more information as required.
- Send your advisory out at least three to five days before the event.

Whom should you talk to?

Every outlet has different rules about who makes the decision about story placement. Generally, direct your calls to:

- **Television:** news assignment editor (for news programming); specific reporter (if you're sure he or she is interested in your story); producer or booking agent (for public affairs/talk show).
- **Radio:** news director (for news story); public affairs director or specific show producer (for public affairs/talk shows).
- **Print:** assignment editor, metro or specific reporter on education, business or lifestyle beats.

NEWS CONFERENCES

You should hold a press conference only when you have *major news* to announce. Never hold a press conference when a press release or press advisory will suffice. A good rule to follow is to hold a press conference only when you think your news is important enough to convince the busiest of reporters to attend.

Notification

News conferences should be arranged by:

- Sending a news release to every community news outlet three to five days before the event.
- Providing the date, time, place and topic of the conference.
- Scheduling the conference to coordinate with media deadlines.
- Making follow-up calls the day before the conference, urging reporters to attend.

Logistics

Site arrangements are important aspects of a successful news conference. Logistics include:

- Selecting a location and room. Consider a classroom or laboratory at your medical school.
- Providing locations that preserve sound—indoors instead of outdoor seating.
- Making sure there are enough three-pronged electrical outlets for reporters' equipment (lights, cameras, etc).
- Hanging an AMSA banner.
- Providing chairs for reporters, name cards for speakers and an easel for visual aids.

Visuals

Almost all news conferences should offer visual presentations for television cameras and print photographs.

Materials

Prepare media kits for reporters attending the conference (and to deliver afterward to those who do not attend). The kits should include:

- A copy of the spokesperson's statement.
- A news release detailing the topic.
- Biographical information and photos of the speakers.
- A fact sheet or brochure on your organization where appropriate.
- Reproductions of charts or graphs used.

Preparation of speakers

Before the news conference:

- Review with the speaker(s) the agenda and the messages you want to convey.
- Prepare possible sound bites and review a sample list of questions and answers.
- Take the role of a reporter and ask the spokesperson(s) questions that may arise.
- Have members of your organization attend to provide expert information and moral support.

When conducting a news conference:

- Double-check the conference room one-hour before the event to make sure everything is set.
- Unlock the room and set up chairs.
- Provide a media sign-in sheet so you can follow up and add reporters to your media list.
- Consider serving refreshments.
- Start the conference on time; limit it to 30 minutes.
- Introduce the speakers.
- Conduct a question-and-answer session after the statement/conference.
- Have a room available for follow-up interviews.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Speak slowly

As if you were leaving an important voicemail.

Pause

Don't go on and on. Take a moment to breathe—this lets the reporter catch up on their notes.

Be kind, rewind

By repeating yourself, you will ensure the reporter gets it right.

Explain, explain, explain

Especially with some of the topics that we cover, you will need to explain. Try not to use medical jargon.

On point

Stay on message!

Reporters are not doctors

Remember that newspapers are written for a sixth-grade audience.

Confirm statistics, studies

Reporters often call AMSA and ask our opinion on studies or statistics. Never comment until you have read them! Don't let them rush you.

Keep It to yourself

Don't go off the record. Period. No exceptions.

Steer the conversation

If the reporter asks a question that you do not want to answer, use a bridging statement to bring the conversation back to your messages.

- "The real issue is..."
- "What we're really talking about is..."
- "Our goal is..."
- "The fact is..."
- "What our real concern is...."
- "Let's not forget..."

End on a high note

The last thing you say is the most important. Say something quotable. This will most likely be a recap of something you've already said.

STAYING IN CONTROL

If You Are in Control, You Will Stay on Message

Ask questions before accepting to do an interview. What is the reporter's angle?

Take time to prepare.

Even as you become familiar with interviews and talking with the press, take time to prepare. Don't take it for granted that you know an issue well. And don't talk to a reporter "off the cuff."

Never answer questions if you don't know the answer.

Tell them you will look into it. There are plenty of resources at AMSA!

Be sure you understand the question.

Don't ever answer a question you don't thoroughly understand. Even if you're live, ask a reporter to repeat the question.

Think before you answer.

If you need time to think, use a phrase such as "That's a good question." Or just pause.

Avoid one-word answers.

Never answer a question with "Yes" and "No." Use every chance you can to get your message out. You won't be quoted if you say "Sure."

Point out the importance.

Use phrases like "The most important thing here is..." or "The real issue here is . . ."

Don't focus on the negative.

If a reporter asks a question with a negative slant, you should respond positively. For example, if they say, "AMSA doesn't focus on that, right?" you should answer with all of the wonderful things AMSA does do.

Beware of leading questions.

If you are asked "Would you say..." Don't just say yes or agree because you want to befriend the reporter. Respond with "No. Actually, the truth is . . ." or "Truthfully, I haven't had the chance to form an opinion."

Use the hook.

If you say, "There are three important points here . . ." the reporter is waiting for three points and won't interrupt you. Make sure the three points are on message and interesting!

Build a bridge.

If the reporter asks a question that you do not want to answer, use a bridging statement to bring the conversation back to your messages.

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- "What we're really talking about is..."
- "Our goal is..."
- "The fact is..."
- "What our real concern is...."
- "Let's not forget..."