



How to work with the media

Wellcome exists to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive.

We're a global charitable foundation, both politically and financially independent.

We support scientists and researchers, take on big problems, fuel imaginations and spark debate.

Why work with the media?

There's more appetite than ever before from the public, and the media, to engage with science.

While there are lots of ways to engage with the public, from school visits and public lectures to presentations at science festivals, many people get most of their information about science, health and wellbeing from the media – through TV and radio news bulletins, newspaper features or breaking stories online.

Engaging with the media is one of the most effective methods to reach the public: TV news broadcasts often have audiences of several million viewers, while online sites for many newspapers have millions of loyal readers each month. More than 3 million people still read some of the UK tabloids.

This is why we believe researchers and other experts should engage with the media to explain and discuss their work. It helps to provide the public and decision makers with information about the latest scientific discoveries or emerging health concerns, particularly where there may be ethical or societal issues at stake. Engaging with the media can convey the wonder of research and the crucial role of science in society. It may even inspire the next generation.

There are many specialist science and health journalists all over the world, including in the UK. Most national outlets have science writers who are knowledgeable, responsible and as passionate about research as you are. Yet you may remain apprehensive about dealing with journalists. What if they dumb down your work? What if they misquote you?

This guide is full of advice for when you have a story to tell, and to show you that working with the media needn't be daunting. It is just one of the tools available to support you in your public and media engagement activities.

To find out more about how Wellcome can support you, visit wellcome.ac.uk/media-office or email media.office@wellcome.ac.uk.

Do you have a story to tell?

Are you about to publish some interesting findings? Have you reached a significant milestone in your research? Do you need to recruit volunteers for your study?

Journalists are keen to know the latest developments in research; they want to know why your work is important and how it might affect their readers, listeners and viewers.

Universities, hospitals and funders may have press office teams who can help you tell your story. They can help prepare a press release or news piece, organise a press briefing and may even offer media training, especially if you are new to media work or your story has controversial elements.

Timing is essential: the sooner you can alert your press office, the better – for example, as soon as your paper has been accepted by a journal. You can speak to the press office ahead of publication and you will not be breaking the journal's embargo policy by doing so. It is best to give at least a week's notice to prepare a press release or brief journalists, but press releases can be turned around faster if absolutely necessary.

Press offices work together, too. To ensure that your approach is coordinated, please let the institution know what other organisations have been involved in your research, for example journals, other universities or funders.

Of course, not every story will be of interest to the national or international media. If you're working with a press office, they can advise you on what makes a story newsworthy and talk you through the options to come up with the best way to tell yours.

Are you an expert?

Journalists are often looking to speak to people who are experts in particular areas of science or research, especially those areas that regularly make the news, such as infectious diseases, genomics or mental health. Knowledgeable, articulate spokespeople add both personality and credibility to a story and so are highly sought after. Please let us know if you would be prepared to act as an expert in your field.

Bear in mind that 'an expert' means something different to the public than it does to your peers. Even if you don't consider yourself an authority on a subject, your experience and knowledge is likely to be greater than that of the majority of people and could be very helpful in bringing a story to life. It can also ensure the media cover stories as accurately as possible.

“It’s really important to undertake media interviews when they arise – however daunting they seem! These opportunities allow you to get the message out about why your research is important and you can really take advantage of any press interest to make your point.”

Trudie Lang, Professor of Global Health Research at the University of Oxford

Getting your message across

One of the main tools that we use to communicate with journalists is the press release (example opposite).

A press release reads like a news story, with key information at the top and less important information further down – the opposite of a research paper! If a press release is aimed at the national media, it will be more ‘lay friendly’ than if it were targeted at the scientific press.

A good press release provides all the information a journalist needs to know. The key elements are:

- 1** **Headline**
This sums up the story in one line and gets the reader’s attention.
- 2** **Embargo**
An embargo is a point in time after which a story may appear in the media.

For academic papers, the journal sets the embargo – for example, Nature is often 18.00 (GMT) on a Wednesday. When you have more control, your press office may set the embargo according to the audience. For example, an embargo of 00.01 works well for breakfast shows and the print editions of national newspapers. It makes it easier for them to be first to report the news, which makes them more likely to run the story.

Most journalists abide by embargoes. It’s fine to speak to them before the story is released, but do remind them of the embargo if one exists. Some journals have strict rules about when you may speak to a journalist. If in doubt, check with us or the journal’s press office.

Some Sunday newspapers in the UK, such as the Sunday Times, have deliberately broken embargoes. We recommend that you exercise caution when speaking to them about forthcoming papers for this reason. Instead, work with Sunday papers on stories that are not linked to journal papers, when the journalist has more time to expand on a particular angle that has been in the news during the week.

- 3** **Opening paragraph**
The first paragraph is crucial to the press release. Journalists claim to spend on average three seconds reading a press release – if the story doesn’t grab them, it may get binned!
- 4** **Context**
This can vary: a press release about the discovery of a gene implicated in type 2 diabetes might also have a short description of the disease, statistics on how many people it affects and information about genes previously discovered. Including historical or cultural details can also help build a stronger case for the importance and relevance of new research.
- 5** **Quotes**
Quotes give colour to a press release. They need to be short, punchy and tell part of the story.
- 6** **Contact details**
Usually for your organisation’s press office or our Media Office, and not for you. This helps protect you from a barrage of calls, and the press office can prioritise interview requests on your behalf.
- 7** **Notes for editors**
Details of your paper or project and ‘boilerplates’ (standard paragraphs summarising all organisations involved).



1 Efficacy of RTS,S malaria vaccine declines over seven years

2 Embargoed until 00.01 BST, 1 July 2016

- 3** Results from a long-term phase II study of the malaria vaccine RTS,S show that its efficacy falls over time. This decline is fastest in children living in areas with higher than average rates of malaria.

The findings, published today in the New England Journal of Medicine, suggest that the benefits of the vaccine are likely to vary across different populations and highlight the need for more research to determine the most effective way of using RTS,S. Last year it became the first-ever malaria vaccine to receive a green light from the European Medicines Agency.

Researchers at the KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme in Kilifi, Kenya, followed 447 children who had received three doses of either RTS,S or a rabies (control) vaccine when they were 5 to 17 months old. After seven years, there were 312 children still involved in the study.

- 4** According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) estimates, more than 400,000 people died from malaria in 2015, with over 90% of these deaths occurring in sub-Saharan Africa. The vast majority who die are children under five, and almost all cases are caused by the P. falciparum strain of malaria transmitted by female Anopheles mosquitoes.

- 5** Senior author Professor Philip Bejon, Director of the KEMRI-Wellcome Trust Research Programme and Professor of Tropical Medicine at the University of Oxford, said: “We found that three-dose vaccination with RTS,S was initially protective, but this was offset by a rebound in later years among children exposed to higher than average levels of malaria-carrying mosquitoes.”

- 6** **Contact**
Hannah Isom, Media Manager
+44 (0)20 7611 8898 h.isom@wellcome.ac.uk

- 7** **Notes for editors**
About KEMRI-Wellcome
The Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI)-Wellcome Trust Research Programme was formally established in 1989 as a partnership between KEMRI, Oxford University and the Wellcome Trust.

About KEMRI
The Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) is a state corporation established through the Science and Technology (Amendment) Act of 1979, as the national body responsible for carrying out health research in Kenya.

About Wellcome
Wellcome exists to improve health for everyone by helping great ideas to thrive.

Questions you might have

What happens after the press release has been issued?

Once the press release has been issued, you may be contacted by journalists wishing to speak to you about your work. Enquiries may come to you via the press office or directly via phone or email.

What do they want to know?

Journalists may be looking for more information about your research, clarification on a particular point or a quote to use in their article.

Be prepared for them to ask about the implications of your work for healthcare, policy or the public, and for them to ask you for your personal or professional opinion. (We have some practical tips on pages 14–17.)

Do I have to speak to them?

You do not have to respond immediately to any enquiries, whether by phone or email. If you receive an unscheduled call from a journalist and you do not feel comfortable talking to them straight away, you can take a number and get back to them. Journalists may try to persuade you to give a quick response, especially if they are rushing to meet a deadline, but it is always better to take the time you need, even if only a couple of minutes, to provide a measured response.

If you know you will not be available to speak to journalists, particularly for the couple of days immediately before or after your research is published, it is important that you let your press office know. If you won't be contactable during that period, please try to suggest someone else who could act as a spokesperson in your absence.

Will my phone be ringing off the hook?

No matter how interesting the research, it is impossible to predict the level of interest from journalists. The media have only a limited amount of space or airtime and stories compete for attention.

Journalists may write up the story using only the information in the press release, without speaking to you directly. Or even if you have spoken to a journalist, your story is not guaranteed to appear. Some journalists may write four or five stories each day, of which only one or two will be published. Similarly, a radio or TV interview may be pre-recorded and then cut, and live interviews can be cancelled at the last minute.

How do broadcast interviews work?

Radio interviews will be either live or pre-recorded. You will usually be asked to go into a studio or use an ISDN line (your institution may have one of these), which broadcasts more clearly than a regular phone. The broadcaster will usually arrange transport for you if you need it.

TV interviews may be held on the day your research is published, or pre-recorded a day or two beforehand. TV stations may ask to film in your lab. Filming can be time-consuming and disruptive: it can take a couple of hours to film a piece only a couple of minutes long. But, TV news reaches large audiences and has a big impact, so it can be worthwhile.

“It is impossible to predict the level of interest from journalists”

Help, I'm swamped!

If you are feeling swamped by media requests, then speak to Wellcome's media office or your press office; we can advise on which media to prioritise or politely decline requests on your behalf.

Communicating controversial issues

If you work in an area with the potential for controversy, it's really worth getting in touch with us or your institutional press office. We can give you support and advice about how to plan ahead for possible media attention or help you prepare for managing complex situations in the future. Even if you don't actively promote your work, it's always possible that it may lead to calls from journalists that you weren't expecting!

In the most difficult or sensitive situations you will often have many options available to you, some of which you may not have previously considered. These could include preparing a reactive press release in case your work is picked up, or putting together a Q&A or briefing document to help you consider different questions a journalist may ask. Many press offices also provide various forms of media training to help you put things into practice.

It's usually best to be as open and engaged with the media as possible, unless there are very specific reasons why you are unable to be. Remember that if you don't speak to a journalist, they may speak to someone else – and it's always better to tell your story yourself.

The Science Media Centre is an independent press office that also offers advice and support on dealing with controversial issues in the UK media. They successfully run press briefings on some of the most sensitive issues in science – from genetic engineering to animal research. They also provide top tips and guidance for researchers, helping them get their voices heard in the midst of a crisis or breaking story. For more information go to sciencemediacentre.org. They also have sister organisations around the world.

Case study: Animals in research

We believe that it is important to be open about research using animals. However, the final decision on whether to talk about your work if it involves animals is up to you and your institution.

In the UK, Wellcome has signed the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research, which commits us to setting out how we will be more open about the animals that are used in the research we fund. If you work in the UK, it is worth checking whether your institution has also signed the Concordat (if they have there will be a statement on their website).

General principles

If your research does involve animals and you are considering talking about it to journalists, it is worth remembering that work involving invertebrates or rodents is less emotive and therefore rarely controversial or the subject of negative media coverage.

If your research involves other mammals, especially non-human primates, it is more likely that it will be of interest to animal rights activists. It's important to think about explaining the three principles of reduction, refinement and replacement (the '3Rs') in relation to your work so that people understand that research

involving these animals is carefully regulated and considered. Worldwide, research using animals is a legal requirement prior to conducting clinical trials of new medicines in humans.

Advice and support

If you would like support in being more open about research involving animals, contact your funder or university press office, who should be able to provide you with advice and training.

If you are based in the UK, we recommend the following organisations who can help with this issue:

- Understanding Animal Research, who also have a wealth of information and resources on their website: understandinganimalresearch.org.uk
- Support4rs can give security advice on dealing with animal rights activists: support4rs.com
- The Science Media Centre provides support to scientists who want to speak about their animal research. They have some specific advice on their website: see 'When animal research hits the headlines' at sciencemediacentre.org



— Remember that you are not talking to thousands but individuals in front of their TV

Tips for speaking to the media

No two interviews will be the same, and print, radio and TV interviews all differ significantly. If you're approached by a journalist, your press office will be able to advise you and help you to prepare.

“Write down three key points that you want to get across”

Ask these questions before you agree:

- What is the programme and what is its audience?
- What is the interview about and what areas specifically will be covered?
- Is anyone else being interviewed, and if so who? Will you be debating the issue with them head-to-head?
- Who will be conducting the interview? The presenter, or someone else in the studio?
- How long will the interview last?
- Is it live or pre-recorded?
- Where will the interview take place? What time should you arrive? Can they arrange transport?

Here are some general tips to consider when doing any interview.

1

Write down three key points that you want to get across and jot down some key facts and figures that help illustrate them.

5

Remember your audience – you are talking to the public, not your peers. Use simple language and avoid scientific terminology, acronyms or long titles.

9

Don't let the interviewer draw you into an area you don't feel comfortable talking about. It's OK to say “I don't know” in answer to a question.

2

Think about what questions you might get asked and how you would respond. What is the one question you wouldn't want to be asked?

6

Use statistics sparingly and try to use everyday terms where possible – for example, say “one in three” or “half” rather than “33 per cent” or “50 per cent”.

10

Beware of throwaway comments: assume that everything you say will be quoted, even if the journalist has closed their notebook or turned off their recorder.

3

Be positive, calm and courteous – and try to answer even the difficult questions, as avoiding them can sound evasive.

7

Be particularly careful with statistics when you are discussing risk (see ‘Communicating risk in a soundbite’ at sciencemediacentre.org for tips).

11

If possible, mention your Wellcome funding and ask the journalist to include this in the piece.

4

The interviewer may pause in an effort to get you to say more than you would like. If you've made your point, stand firm and don't be tempted to fill the silence.

8

Be careful of questions that start: “So what you are saying is...” If that's not what you're saying, say so and answer in your own words.

12

Ask your press office to run through a mock interview with you if you think it will be helpful.

Different interview formats



For radio

1. Be wary of wearing bracelets or anything that might make a noise when you gesticulate, as this can be distracting for a listener.
2. Smile before you speak – it will instantly lift the tone of your voice and make you sound more engaging.
3. Try to avoid too many ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’, but don’t become fixated on this. The odd one will not be noticed by your listeners.
4. Provided that you do not rustle any papers, it could be useful to have some brief notes in front of you while you do the interview.



For TV

1. Remember that you are not talking to thousands but individuals in front of their TV.
2. Try to treat the interview like a conversation with the interviewer – avoid the temptation to look at the camera, unless it is a remote interview ‘down the line’.
3. Choose plain, smart clothes that will not be distracting on TV. Pastel colours work particularly well. Try to avoid close patterns like checks and stripes, which can cause ‘strobing’ on camera.



For print

1. If a journalist calls you, it’s a good idea to take a moment to gather your thoughts. Ask if you can call them back in 10 minutes.
2. Don’t expect the journalist to show you a copy of the article before it is published. Journalists may agree to show any direct quotes, but even this is not guaranteed.
3. Never speak ‘off the record’ unless you know the journalist well and are absolutely sure you can trust them not to repeat or report your comments.



For online

It’s not just the traditional media – newspapers and broadcasters – that are interested in research stories. Stories are reported, shared, discussed (and criticised) everywhere online, including on blogs, Twitter, Facebook, community networks like Mumsnet, Instagram and video streaming sites.

Internet coverage has advantages: it reaches a wide audience, can be more engaging and – if the journalist makes an error – is easier to correct. You’ll often see a comments section under a news or blog piece, which can generate interesting, often heated discussion. It’s also easier to tailor a news story to a particular audience or format – on the internet there’s endless space and a massive audience, particularly with more people regularly using their smartphones to go online.

However, it can also mean that a potentially negative story can blow up into a crisis within hours or even minutes on social networks such as Twitter. This means it’s always best to think twice before making throwaway comments online.

All media outlets now have an online presence, offering much more content than their print or broadcast editions. On the Guardian website, for example, you may see your research reported in a news article, discussed in a blog post, accompanied by a gallery of images or a video, and discussed on its Science Weekly podcast.

When you are telling us about your research, please think about what additional content you can offer:

- Do you have any visually striking images or infographics that we could provide to online outlets, or any footage of your research?
- Would you be willing to write a comment piece or blog post to accompany any news coverage?
- Is your story something that’s of particular interest to a specific group, for example parents or those suffering from a particular health condition, who might be better targeted via a live chat online?
- Do you have any interactive content – for example a quiz or questionnaire that people can complete online?

Contact from patients and their families

If your research relates to a particular disease, it's possible that patients or their family members will be prompted to contact you directly as a result of seeing your research in the news. This can be particularly challenging if your work is at a very early stage and unlikely to be of benefit to patients for many years.

You shouldn't feel compelled to answer every enquiry personally, but it's worth giving some thought to how you will handle contact from the public in advance of carrying out media work. Can you engage in advance with a patient charity who may be able to provide helpful materials?

You may also consider asking your press office to respond to any enquiries on your behalf with a generic statement. For example:

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your email regarding the recent reports in the media about our research.

These findings are an important step towards helping us understand what causes Crohn's disease. However, it may take many years before this kind of knowledge can be used to develop new treatments.

If you have any concerns regarding Crohn's disease, then please contact your GP or NHS 111 (dial 111 from your phone).

You may also wish to contact the Crohn's & Colitis UK (www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk or tel. 0300 222 5700).

Best wishes,

[Your name]

Contact details

E media.office@wellcome.ac.uk
T 020 7611 8866

Wellcome Trust, 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, United Kingdom
T +44 (0)20 7611 8888, F +44 (0)20 7611 8545, E contact@wellcome.ac.uk, wellcome.ac.uk

The Wellcome Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales, no. 210183.
Its sole trustee is The Wellcome Trust Limited, a company registered in England and Wales, no. 2711000
(whose registered office is at 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, UK). MS-6549.7/1k/09-2016/LP

