

How to Get the Media to Cover CRC and/or Your Event

Making news is an excellent way to raise public awareness of colorectal cancer. You can raise awareness by getting media coverage for either colorectal cancer itself or by getting coverage for an event you are hosting about colorectal cancer. Why is media coverage such a powerful tool for raising public awareness? The Freedom Forum media Studies Center estimates that approximately 20 million Americans read the newspaper and that on an average night between 30 and 40 million people watch network news. Nielsen Media television ratings data indicate that in the average household the television set is on seven and a half hours every day. With the blurring of information and entertainment programming and the proliferation of specialty cable, Americans are getting more news from more places, seven and a half hours a day. From CNN, MSNBC, and even CNBC, to network morning shows, daytime talk shows, local news, and call-in talk shows to late night talk shows and evening news...American are watching.

What can CCA members do to get local media coverage of CRC?

As a CCA member and volunteer, you can get our message out in your local community through the local media several ways:

- Sponsor a local event and invite local news media to cover that event.
- Contact local news outlets and tell them your story and CCA's story. Encourage them to cover the story.
- Write a personalized letter to the editor of your local papers.

How do you get started?

The first step is to put together a contact list of reports in your local community. Local media is generally separated into two categories: Print Media and Broadcast Media. Print includes anything written – newspapers and magazines – while broadcast media includes television and radio. Recently, electronic media has made significant inroads, and your local community might have local Internet sites that cover local events. If this is the case, you should also try to identify the content managers at those sites for your contact list.

You'll want to identify the managing editor or health editors for your local newspapers and magazines. For television and radio stations, identify health reporters and general assignment reporters who cover local community news. Assignment editors at the stations will be able

to direct you to the right reporters. If your local stations have local talk shows, identify the producers of those shows as well. Once you have the list, you can begin to contact these people.

It would also be extremely helpful to CCA if you would send a copy of your media contact list to Angela Brown at ABrown@CCAlliance.org or to the main office address.

To get coverage of an event

In order to ensure that the media is well informed about your event, you can use several communication tools to get their attention. All of these can be sent on CCA's letterhead which is included in electronic format and can be e-mailed to you by Angela Brown (abrown@ccalliance.org).

- **Media Advisories:** Send media advisories (about three weeks prior) to let the print media know of any events you might be holding. An advisory briefly summarizes the Who, What, Where and When of an event (see samples at end of this section). A few days before the event, send another advisory with updated information and then make calls to the key people on your list to follow up.
- **Press Releases:** Develop a press release about your event. The press release should emphasize the local angle and use quotes from the local community – preferably dignitaries such as the mayor or city council members. Distribute this release to the media who attend. After the event, revise the press release to include information about how the event went (see sample at end of this section)
- **Public Service Announcements:** Contact local radio stations and ask them to broadcast PSA's (public service announcements) prior to your event. Provide public affairs directors with scripts for a 15 second and a 30 second PSA (see sample at end of this section). You should have these scripts to them about three weeks prior to your event. Send the scripts again one week prior to your event. Follow up with a phone call at this time.
- **Advance request for coverage:** Several weeks before the event, send an advance request for coverage to local television and radio station reporters. Be sure to let them know in advance what your event is and provide them with the Who, What, When and Where of your event (see sample

at end of this section). A few days before the event, send another request for coverage, and follow up with a phone call to all reporters on your contact list.

To get coverage of CRC without a specific event

Even if you are not hosting a specific event, you can still encourage your local media to cover colorectal cancer issues. For example, use the fact that March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month as the hook. Using the same list of media contacts, the following tools might get you some local coverage:

- **Press release:** Distribute a general press release about Colorectal Cancer Awareness (see samples at end of this section). Insert local statistics to the best of your ability (see state statistics under CRC Education section). Try to get local quotes about the importance of recognizing this disease – quotes from local doctors or council members or other public figures or do highlights on a survivor or a new drug being released.
- **Press kit:** Send a press kit with a cover letter to the reporters on your contact list. Include in this kit the press release described above and CCA fact sheets to give the reporters the background to write a story. Include in the letter a brief summary of your story or your connection to CRC. Offer your willingness to be interviewed and to help find other sources for interviews. Specifically request that they do a feature on colorectal cancer (see sample). These kits should be sent to reporters in early February, (if doing for March Awareness Month) with follow-up calls a week or so later.
- **Letter to the Editor:** Write a personalized letter to the editor for all your local print media. Write a cover highlighting a survivor or a new clinical trial and ask that your letter be included in an upcoming issue.
- **Op-Ed:** Many newspapers offer a “guest editorial” slot – not a letter to the editor, but an opinion column. Contact the person in charge of the editorial page of your local paper and ask them to print your op-ed piece (see sample)

