

BRITISH JOURNAL OF
**HOSPITAL
MEDICINE****MMC**
Modernising Medical Careers**MODERNISING
MEDICAL CAREERS****Managing the media 2:
a guide for
the foundation year doctor** **M114***Rachel Hooke***The applied anatomy of
appendicectomy** **M116***Harold Ellis***Radiology of acute
shoulder injuries** **M118***S Basu, SHM Khan***Orbital swelling:
a simplified guide** **M121***AL Creavin, ST Creavin, R Khooshabeh***An ethical dilemma on call** **M126***Z Ahmad***So you want to be ...
a rheumatologist** **M128***Sarah J Farrow, Gabrielle H Kingsley***IN NEXT MONTH'S
MMC SUPPLEMENT****Discharge summaries: guidance for
foundation doctors****Radiology of acute hand injuries****The applied anatomy of rectal
examination**

Managing the media 2: a guide for the foundation year doctor

Introduction

At some point, a journalist may approach you, or you may contact the media yourself. This could be the medical or lay press.

You could be:

- Interviewed on radio or television
- Interviewed for a newspaper or magazine
- Writing to/for a newspaper, magazine, journal or book yourself
- Writing on a message board with press access.

This is the second of two articles on dealing with the media. The first covered speaking on radio (Hooke, 2010), and this one covers non-radio aspects. Above all, enjoy your encounters with the media. Build on them, and you may become famous rather than infamous. Journalists will call upon you in preference to others.

In print

Remember that journalists have got a job to do, just like you. They are under pressure from their editors to obtain material and meet deadlines. Journalists are generally pleasant people, or they would not get far. They will flatter you for a story, but they will ask searching questions.

Be aware that your employer may not look kindly upon you saying anything controversial in their name. You may want to check with your trust's communications office or simply not mention who you work for. You can be quoted as: 'Yorkshire junior doctor Rachel Hooke says...' rather than: 'Rachel Hooke, a junior doctor at Yorkshire County Hospital, says...' As with speaking on the radio (Hooke, 2010), do not be tempted to criticize your workplace, no matter how strongly you feel.

If you are interviewed for a magazine or newspaper, ask the journalist to send you a transcript beforehand of what he/

she is planning to publish. This will not always happen, but it can be quite revealing. Whatever you say can be taken out of context. Reporters can omit part of your sentence or put two sentences together to cast an entirely different meaning on affairs. Do watch affirmative answers. Be aware that if you answer simply 'yes' or 'no', a whole quotation can be attributed to you. For instance, if I say 'yes' to the question: 'Do you think X is an idiot?', this will be reported as: 'Dr Hooke says: "I think X is an idiot."' You may be surprised and wonder if you really gave those quotations. The journalist may have twisted your words, hoping that you will agree. If you are to be anonymous, this may be acceptable, because your peers will not recognize the phraseology as yours. If your words are taken completely out of context in your name without prior consent, then that is bad form. You have to assume that everyone believes what they read or hear in the press, even educated doctors.

Journalists can make genuine mistakes and not intend to mislead. They may be ignorant. Those working for the medical press are generally familiar with systems and jargon. However, the lay press may still not grasp concepts, such as what different types of doctors do, or what their responsibilities are. Stories can become exaggerated to the point of being apocryphal, particularly if copied without the original source being consulted. Editors can also have a hand in making disadvantageous changes, perhaps without realizing.

If you have got no comment on a particular issue, do not be afraid to say just that. If you really do not want to answer a question, the only thing you can say is: 'No comment.' If you say anything else, you will get drawn into conversation and quoted, perhaps to your detriment. Journalists can use the 'no comment' get-out to make people look foolish, but that is better than being quoted saying something controversial.

Bear in mind that two can play games and you can also use the media to try and put across your own message. Despite

Dr Rachel Hooke is Working Time Directive (WTD) Implementation Manager, Airedale NHS Trust, Steeton, Keighley, West Yorkshire BD20 6TD

these tales of woe, by working constructively with journalists, both you and they can benefit.

When writing for a magazine, newspaper or newsletter yourself then, again, the same rules apply. You need to be aware about consulting your trust's press office and being careful what you say and how you describe yourself, including your job title. You could write for your trust's regular newsletter or magazine. Relatively few foundation doctors do. This may be because they are not encouraged to, because no-one else has done so, or because they do not feel part of the corporate culture. Writing for journals is a whole different topic and will not be covered here.

Other media

You have to be careful when using professional and non-professional message boards (Cassidy et al, 2008), including when off duty. You may still be identified from your username and details given, even if your profile is hidden. As with other media, you may still be associated with your trust even if you do not reveal it in any way.

Be careful about speaking out at any meetings or conferences you attend, in case the press are there. You will not want to find yourself under threat of disciplinary action when you return to work, particularly if the hospital has been identified in some way.

On television, do not be afraid to make strong eye contact with your interviewer,

as looking away can be very noticeable. Be aware of what you are wearing, unless you are encountered unexpectedly in the street by a reporter. Aim to look smart and professional. As with radio, try not to sound nervous and do not allow yourself to be put off by unexpected questions.

Conclusions

Check with your employer's communications department before speaking to the media. You can get the media on your side but, ultimately, they have to sell their story. Ask if you can read any transcript before the story is published. Cultivate relationships with the media and enjoy the experience. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: Dr Hooke has worked in both management and medicine. Her views are her own and do not necessarily reflect those of her employer or any other organization that she is associated with.

Cassidy J, Graham N, Moore P (2008) The perils of internet networking. *BMJ Careers* **29 Oct**: <http://careers.bmj.com/careers/advice/view-article.html?id=3110> (accessed 14 May 2010)

Hooke R (2010) Managing the media 1: a guide for the foundation year doctor *Br J Hosp Med* **71(7)**: M98–M99

KEY POINTS

- Speak to your trust's communications department before anything is circulated in your name and/or theirs.
- Ask to read the transcript before printing.
- Build up good relationships with journalists.
- There is nothing to stop you writing for your trust's publication.
- Be careful when writing on message boards or speaking at conferences.