The Clinical Researcher and the Media

John T. Burklow, Associate Director for Communications, NIH
Principles and Practice of Clinical Research – January 12, 2010
Major Media Interviews

- **CNN's** Anderson Cooper 360's Mary Anne Fox will interview NHGRI's Dr. William Gahl, Clinical Center Director Dr. John Gallin, and multiple clinicians who consult to the Undiagnosed Diseases Program (UDP), about the UDP.

- **NBC** Nightly News' Robert Bazell will interview Dr. John Tisdale, senior investigator in the NIH Molecular and Clinical Hematology Branch, about a paper to be released Wednesday showing that a modified blood stem-cell transplant regimen has effectively reversed sickle cell disease in adults.

- **New York Times Magazine**'s Pamela Paul will interview Dr. Daniel Pine, chief of NIMH's Section on Development and Affective Neuroscience and chief of Child and Adolescent Research in the Mood and Anxiety Disorders Program, about early onset depression in pre-schoolers.

- **Reuters Health**'s Michelle Rizzo interviewed Dr. Beth Fox, NCI Center for Cancer Research, about pegfilgrastim versus filgrastim after dose-intensive chemotherapy in young adults and children with sarcomas.

- **USA Today**'s Liz Szabo, Los Angeles Times' Shari Roan and Health Day's Serena Gordon interviewed Dr. Rachel Ballard-Barbash, NCI Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, about consumption of soy products and breast cancer recurrence.

- **USA Today**'s Steve Sternberg interviewed NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci about the H1N1 autopsy study.

- **NPR**'s Patricia Neighmond, ABC News' Susan Schwartz, and WebMD's Sailynn Boyles interviewed Dr. Brenda Edwards, NCI Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences, about the annual report to the nation on the status of cancer.
What Makes News in Science and Medicine?

- Big impact
- Novelty
- The unexpected
- Celebrity
- Published science
Why Reporters Want You: A Game of “Quotes and Experts”

- Reliance on interviews
- Deadline pressure
- Quotes bring stories to life
- Expert sources carry credibility
- Hints of controversy
Why You Should Talk to Reporters

• Improves accuracy
• Creates favorable climate
• Stewardship of public resources
• Brings context to stories
What the Public Doesn’t Know about Science

- Research yields new knowledge and raises new questions
- Legitimate controversies exist
- Research questions take a long time to investigate
- Health messages can change, based on new knowledge
- Studies of large groups do not necessarily relate to an individual
When a Reporter Contacts You

The best response for you to give when a reporter contacts you directly is:

- “Sure, I can talk with you right now. What would you like to talk about?”
- “I’d be happy to talk with you, but I am not allowed.”
- “I’d be happy to talk with you. Would you coordinate this with my Communications Office? Here’s who you should call.”
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Seek Advice

Before speaking with a reporter, seek advice from your supervisor and your IC Communications Office

- Previous experience with this reporter
- NIH position on issue
- Appropriateness of your participation
Terms of the Journalistic Trade

• **On the Record:** A reporter can quote you directly, using your name and title.

• **Not for Attribution and On Background:** A reporter can use the information you give, including direct quotes, but you are not to be named. You may be identified as an NIH scientist, or a knowledgeable NIH source.

• **Off the Record:** A reporter cannot use your information in a story as coming from you; however, the reporter can use it in other ways such as getting another source to respond to your comment.
On the Record

Despite the various ground rules, when talking to a reporter it is always best to be:

✓ **On the Record**

  • Not for Attribution and On Background
  • Off the Record
Interview the Reporter

- Name and phone number?
- Newspaper? TV show? Radio?
- Deadline?
- Story line?
- What does the reporter want from you?
Special Considerations for Scientists

- Embargoes
- Freedom of Information Act
Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

FOIA provides individuals with a right to access to records in the possession of the federal government.
All the items below that may be made available under FOIA:

- **Minutes of NIH Institution Review Boards**
- **Your computer files**
- **Document drafts**
- **Your e-mail messages**
- **Approved research protocols**
Science in the News

• Stem Cells
• Clinical Trials
• Flu
• Future of Biomedical Research
Summary

Why

• Media interest in medical research
• Obligation to the public
• Adds credibility

How

• Plain language
• On the record
• Ask for help