



Tips for Interacting with Media

Doctors have an important and respected voice in the health care debate. Here's how to use yours more effectively when speaking with reporters as a PNHP leader:

Make a list of tough questions: Study the "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" page on the PNHP website (and keep it open on your device if doing an interview over the phone!). Review the latest news and opinion to brainstorm additional questions and practice how you would answer them. For example:

- *Won't Medicare for All destroy the current Medicare program for seniors?*
- *Won't single payer bankrupt the federal government?*
- *Won't Medicare for All force doctors to take a 40% pay cut?*

Pivot back to single payer: Try to address the question, but follow the "Don McCanne Rule" and conclude every statement with, "Under a well-designed single payer system ... " For example, if the reporter asks, "*Won't Medicare for all cause health care rationing?*" you could say, "*No, and in fact, the U.S. already rations care based on income. As a doctor, I see patients every day who skip medications or delay treatments because insurance refuses to cover it. More than 20,000 Americans die every year because they don't have health insurance. That's rationing! Under a well-designed single-payer system, everyone in the U.S. can see the doctor of their choice when they need to, not just when they happen to have coverage.*"

It's OK not to know: Be honest if you don't know a particular fact, but pivot back to what you **do** know. "*I don't know exactly what Canada's administrative overhead is, but I can tell you that in the U.S., 30% of every health care dollar goes to paperwork, overhead, CEO salaries, and profits -- not patient care. By contrast, traditional Medicare overhead is only 3%. Think of the billions we could save by expanding Medicare to everyone!*"

Make bold, colorful statements and speak from a doctor's perspective: Reporters are more likely quote you if you use specific examples and colorful quotes, as opposed to slogans or broad policy statements. Use concrete examples from your own practice: patients not seeking treatment until it's too late, time wasted on billing, insurance companies denying payment. Instead of, "It takes effort to navigate my patients' insurance plans," say "I'm banging my head against the wall trying to get my patients the care they need," or "One of my patient's insulin costs went from \$100 per month to \$500 per month, and now she's skipping doses in order to pay the rent!"

Respect the reporter's time: Most reporters work under strict deadlines and must research, write and submit their news story by the end of the day. When contacted by a reporter, ask her for her deadline and try your best to meet it.

Establish relationships with media figures in your area: Journalists are short on time, and tend to tap existing sources for background information or quotes. But they are always looking for new sources, and that should be you! Email an introduction to a reporter to comment on a story, offer expertise, or to let them know about an event or new study. Follow them on Twitter and respond to their posts.

Don't be afraid to push back: If someone publishes a story you think is unfair, let them know. Copy the applicable passages, along with a counterargument, and contact the reporter directly with a corrective. Stick to the facts and maintain a helpful tone. This communication serves to correct the misinformation and also establish your relationship with the journalist.

Contact PNHP Communications Specialist Clare Fauke (clare@pnhp.org) for help with media outreach.



Writing op-eds & letters to the editor

What's the difference between a Letter to the Editor (LTE) and op-ed?

Most newspapers feature an "Op-Ed" and "Letters to the Editor" section in which readers and public figures can express viewpoints and/or respond to news events. An Op-Ed is a short (600–750 words) article expressing an opinion or viewpoint on a timely news topic. An LTE is a very short (150–200 words) response to an article that recently appeared in the publication.

LTE Guidelines:

The LTE page allows readers to provide feedback to published articles. Newspapers and magazines will often print several letters on the same topic to show a range of opinion.

- Keep it shorter than 200 words. Make one clear argument, and get to the point quickly.
- Respond quickly (ideally within 24 hours) to a published article or opinion piece, and mention the article's title and date at the start of your letter. For example: *"Dear editor: The Sept. 10 editorial "How can we afford 'Medicare for all'?" asks the wrong question. The real question is, how can we continue to afford our current fragmented and wasteful health care system?"*
- Use statistics, but provide hyperlinks in the text to current, credible sources.
- Submit letter in the body of email (no attachments), along with phone, address and brief bio.
- Review the publication's specific guidelines, usually found in the "contact us" website page.

Op-ed Guidelines:

Op-eds are longer pieces that express the views of contributors who are experts or members of the community. "Op-ed" is short for "opposite the editorial page" because of its physical placement in print newspapers; not to be confused with "editorials" which are written by an outlet's editorial board.

- **Be relevant:** While not as time-sensitive as LTEs, op-eds should relate to a current event or issue, preferably something covered in the newspaper within the past week.
- **Use your voice & personal story:** Editors are interested in first-person testimony from local experts. Use your voice as a physician, and lead with a personal story about an experience in the health system. For example, many successful op-eds start with the story of a patient who delayed treatment because of cost, then explained how single payer could solve this problem.
- **Mind your tone:** Editors are looking for a sixth-grade reading level: active voice, short sentences, and no technical jargon. Use statistics, but provide links in the text to current, credible sources.
- **Strategize your placement:** We all want to be published in the *New York Times*, but they receive hundreds of competing op-eds each week. You are much more likely to be published in your local paper or medical specialty outlet (and if you live in New York, consider the town where you grew up or went to med school). Since many local papers are owned by bigger chains, your piece may be syndicated in affiliated outlets, and well-written op-eds will be shared widely on social media, attracting thousands of additional readers.
- **Submit** your op-ed in the body of an email (no attachments) along with your phone, address and short bio. Instructions can usually be found on the opinion page of the paper's website.

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Planning Events to Maximize Press Coverage

Journalists want to cover events, not just ideas. To maximize press coverage, organize a lively public event with a strong message and plenty of visuals.

The type of event matters: While media coverage is a key goal, plan an event that would be successful *without* media coverage (i.e., *not* a press conference). Host a movie screening (Fix It or Big Pharma), a health policy forum with doctors and patients, a march or rally, a “die-in”, or show up as a group to a town hall meeting to express support for single payer. Imagine the headline you would love to see in your local paper, or the photo or video of your event. Plan your event to achieve that vision.

Make it easy for reporters to cover you: If it doesn’t negatively affect participation, hold your event before noon as most reporters need to complete their story by late afternoon. Choose a venue that is accessible and centrally located, with plenty of parking or easy access to public transit. Hold rallies in well-known public places or choose a “target” such as an insurance company headquarters or an elected official’s office.

Visuals tell the story: Bring banners, signs, and any compelling props like tombstones for a die-in. Doctors should wear their white coats, scrubs, and stethoscope, along with stickers, buttons, and hats.

Media outreach: Email a media advisory to health reporters, city reporters, and assignment editors at local print, radio, and TV outlets about 4-5 days ahead. The advisory should be less than a page, and include the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY of your event. Call the assignment editor to follow up and request that they place the event on their assignment calendar.

Day of event: Prepare 2-3 spokespeople who are comfortable speaking with press. Assign a volunteer to be the dedicated press liaison, who will bring packets for media including the press release and any important materials, speaker bios, and contact info. The liaison should approach reporters as soon as they arrive to organize interviews. While TV stations will have cameras, print and radio reporters are harder to spot. They may be wearing ID clips or lanyards (like a press pass), carrying notepads, audio recorders, microphones and headphones. When in doubt, introduce yourself. Don’t forget to assign other volunteers who can livestream to Facebook Live and post photos to social media.

Follow up: Meeting a reporter at an event is a great opportunity to build an important relationship. Get the reporter’s business card and be sure to send a follow-up email with extra information, event plans, and an invitation to work together in the future. For example:

Hi Charlie, this is Dr. Smith from Physicians for a National Health Program’s [ANYTOWN] Chapter. It was great to meet you at the Medicare for All rally yesterday. We discussed the number of deaths caused by uninsurance and I wanted to make sure you had a copy of the study I mentioned (attached). I also thought you might be interested in this event we have planned next month. Please let me know if you have any questions about Medicare for all. You can always reach me at this email or on my cell, 555-123-4567. Thanks!

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Sample Press Release

Hundreds of doctors to march in Chicago for single-payer health care

Health care advocates keep pressure on Congress as Medicare for All gains record support

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 29, 2018

Contacts:

Clare Fauke, communications specialist, PNHP, clare@pnhp.org, 312-782-6006; or

Pastor Emma Lozano, Lincoln United Methodist Church, Emma@somosunpueblo.com, 773-671-1798

WHAT: “Health Care as a Human Right” march and rally

WHEN: Saturday, April 29, 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

WHERE: March begins at Malcolm X College, 1900 West Jackson Blvd. at 5:00 p.m, continues south on Damen. Rally at the Louis Pasteur Monument (in front of Old Cook County Hospital), 1900 West Harrison at 5:30 p.m.

WHO: Approximately 200-300 health care professionals wearing white coats and scrubs

This Saturday, hundreds of doctors and other health care providers will join community members to demand an end to our nation’s fragmented, for-profit health system. Wearing their white coats and holding signs, marchers will call on Congress to enact [H.R. 676](#), The Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Act.

“Even under the Affordable Care Act, millions of Americans remain uninsured, and those with insurance have high copays and deductibles that deter them from seeking care,” said Dr. David Ansell, Senior Vice President and Associate Provost for Community Health Equity at Rush University Medical Center and a member of Physicians for a National Health Program. “Now is the time to replace the Affordable Care Act with real health care reform—Medicare for All—for our patients, family members, and neighbors.”

Momentum towards a national health program is unprecedented. While congressional Republicans try to strip the Affordable Care Act of its most basic provisions, the Medicare for all bill now claims support from a majority of congressional Democrats.

“Health care is a human right, not a commodity to be bought and sold,” said Pastor Emma Lozano of the Lincoln United Methodist Church. “Families should not have to choose between putting food on the table and taking their kids to the doctor.”

Other speakers include:

- Nahiris M. Bahamón, M.D., resident in pediatrics at University of Chicago and a board adviser for Physicians for a National Health Program
- Paul Pierre, M.D., Partners in Health
- Linda Rae Murray, M.D., M.P.H., former Chief Medical Officer, Cook County Public Health
- Claudia Fegan, M.D., executive medical officer for the Cook County Health and Hospital System and chief medical officer at John H. Stroger Jr. Hospital of Cook County; national coordinator, Physicians for a National Health Program.

Physicians for a National Health Program (www.pnhp.org) is a nonprofit research and educational organization of more than 22,000 doctors who support a single-payer national health program.