



## Oncology Nursing Society

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### **Top Ten Tips for Integrating Local Media into Advocacy Efforts**

Just as all politics is local, all local politicians read their local papers and follow their local news. Congressional staffers in each Member's office are dedicated to this task of monitoring local media coverage of their bosses, issues of interest and priority to constituents, and other related items. Anytime the member's name appears in print or on broadcast media, s/he knows about it. When you are the person who has mentioned their name or is responsible for getting their name in print, you have usually elevated your standing with that Member and his or her office.

Likewise, when your name appears in print, it gives you additional third-party credibility. Every media mention of you or the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) should be sent by email or fax (whichever is the staffer's preferred mode of communication) to the Congressional staffer with whom you work in each Congressional office that you maintain a relationship with. Staffers maintain files on all major issues and when the time comes to reach out or seek consultation from a constituent expert, you want to be the person who has made both the personal contacts and done the media outreach.

In addition to utilizing the media for positive and proactive reasons, there may be times during your advocacy efforts when you have exhausted most of the traditional means of communicating with elected officials directly. Appropriate use of media tools can provide another vehicle for getting your point across, delivering a clear message, and holding your elected officials accountable.

***Important note: While most of the legislative and political professionals based in Washington, DC want coverage in the New York Times and the Washington Post, enormous attention is paid by members and their staff to the local media outlets back home such as the town newspaper.***

Most of us are consumers of the media. To utilize the media for health policy purposes, you need to change your perspective from a consumer to an influencer and a participant in the media. Dealing with the media can be daunting. There are many types of media with different rules and protocols for engaging them. The following tips focus on ways to reach out to the media to bolster your ability to influence elected officials.

1. View the media as an opportunity. The newspapers, radio stations, television stations, and on-line news services need content. There will be times that you can provide relevant, important information to the media that will benefit ONS. Local media are always on the lookout for local stories. You can be a resource for them.

2. You do not need front-page articles or a segment on the local news to have an impact. Members of Congress and their staff read letters to the editor. Be sure not to overlook this important opportunity. Letters must be concise and specific and should include a local angle (e.g. include local/state statistics on the nursing shortage or state specific cancer incidence and mortality data). Each local paper has different rules for submission of letters to the editor. Typically these guidelines can be found in the front section of the newspaper on the editorial page or on the on-line version of the newspaper. Also, some papers have different letters sections in print and on-line. For most publications, timeliness is a key factor. Time your letter to make it relevant to a recent article or current event if possible.
3. Legislative activity often will not engender media coverage, but provides an excellent opportunity to inject your perspective vis-à-vis a letter to the editor. For example, introduction of legislation at the federal or state level, the legislative body considering or taking action on relevant legislation, wanting to thank or ask for co-sponsors on a favored bill, or an elected official speaking out on an issue of concern will not necessarily show up in the news, but make great subjects for letters to the editors. Members appreciate and enjoy being thanked publicly for taking action that pleases their constituents. The corollary also is true – when a member is publicly “called out” for lack of support or a position contrary to a vocal constituent, it often elicits a response and attention from the office that the constituent might not have been otherwise able to generate through traditional advocacy tactics. Again, timeliness is a key factor.
4. In any interaction with the media, remember, you are the expert. You have the facts and the expertise about oncology nursing and what it takes to provide quality cancer care to those in need. Tell your story in a clear, concise, and honest way – just the way you speak with your patients and their family members. Be respectful of their profession as well. Be aware of their deadlines whether they are asking you to be a source or you are asking them to consider a story. Understand that you may need to educate members of the media about basic facts, too. Be patient.
5. When initiating contact with the media, determine in advance the appropriate spokesperson for the case you are making. Sometime you will be the appropriate spokesperson. Other times, it will help to have the national perspective and you may wish to reach out to ONS headquarters or the ONS Health Policy Associates. ♦
6. Many of the same standards you use for contacting legislators also apply to the media. Be professional, be concise. Most importantly, be prepared. In any interaction with the media, the most important rule is to tell the truth and provide facts. It is okay to say, “I don’t know, but I will find out.” Then, be sure to follow-up and find out in a timely fashion.

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7. Monitor your member's media appearances and respond appropriately. If s/he is doing a call in show or an on-line interview, call in or send questions. If you like something you heard during an interview, voicing your pleasure vis-à-vis a letter to the editor is a perfect way to follow-up and express support.
8. Create media opportunities, like press conferences, when appropriate. Take advantage of situations (such as a Member's Town Hall Meeting) where the media is present to introduce yourself. Consider whether events you are organizing or attending (e.g. ONS Chapter Annual Meeting) warrant media coverage.\*
9. Create a local media directory. Get to know the reporters who cover ONS-related issues (health care beat, political). Make yourself a source for them. Use CapWiz at the ONS Legislative Action Center ([www.onslac.org](http://www.onslac.org)) to identify local media contact information.
10. Utilize the ONS Communication Department for talking points, messaging and other questions about interacting with the media.

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\* For more information about how to utilize Town Hall Meetings, see ONS Ten Tips for Town Hall Meetings.