Jennifer Heslop-Spencer/The Aurum Institute

Media strategies are an important part of your overall communications plan. Decide how you will involve news media before, during, and after the trial.

Chapter 9

Working with the Media

Media coverage can shape public opinion about a clinical trial and about medical research in general (Grimes 1999). Scientific research about HIV and other infectious diseases is often newsworthy, so you should expect media interest in your trial. In today's globalized world, a small story in a local paper can quickly escalate into national and international coverage through Web sites, online media, international television, and new social media formats. Similarly, international news is instantly available at the community level, where it can contribute to knowledge or cause confusion, concern, and misinterpretation.

The media can also influence funders, policymakers, and ethics review committees. Accurate media coverage of an issue can educate and inform potential participants and partners, bolster public support for your trial, and advance the public health agenda. Inaccurate or inflammatory news coverage, on the other hand, can spread rumors, sideline research, and even scare government officials away from approving research that might attract controversy.

Your overall communications strategy (see Chapter 3) should include a component that describes how you plan to work with the media before, during, and after completion of your trial. It is important to build relationships of trust with key members of the media and to understand their role in translating science to the public.

In this chapter

Julio Sandoval

Wila Frias (left), lead counselor at the Asociación Civil Selva Amazonica, is interviewed about the iPrEx trial and HIV prevention.

I Understanding the media

Most people—be they politicians, policymakers, funders, or trial participants—get much of their news and information from the popular press. An understanding of how the media operates is the first step to learning how to communicate clearly and effectively with

journalists. This, in turn, increases the likelihood that the reports about your research will be accurate and informative, and it helps to frame the public discussion in a constructive way (Kampen 2000).

Guideline 1. Researchers and journalists have different goals. Journalists need to come up with stories that will grab public interest and often must publish them within days, if not hours. Researchers ask a question and typically spend years systematically looking for evidence—possibly finding an inconclusive answer. As a scientist, you can help journalists meet their needs and yours by helping them write accurate stories about your trial. (See Box 9.1.)

At CAPRISA we involve the media in whatever we are doing, so the media can be one way of disseminating information. We know that if you don't involve the media, it may be difficult for you. They might think that you are hiding something… What can I say? Bad stories sell better. People like to read bad stories.

You have to involve them from the beginning. They have to understand what is happening. What is happening when these people enroll in this study? What drug is being tested? How is it going to be conducted? They have to have correct information.

—Mukelisiwe Mlotshwa, Research Nurse, CAPRISA, Vulindlela, South Africa

Effective media relations begin with understanding the goals and limitations of journalism. Professional journalists are bound by:

- Autonomy (journalistic independence)
- Media deadlines, extreme time pressures
- The use of multiple sources for balanced reporting
- A need to attribute facts and quotes
- A need to check the facts
- A need for information to be condensed
- Competition among media—they need to be first with the news or get an exclusive

Desmond Ajoko/FHI Nigeria

Former U.S. President William Clinton has been instrumental in helping reduce prices for HIV drugs in Africa.

Box 9.1. News media goals versus trial site goals

Media goals/functions	Trial site goals	How to reconcile
Report the news and inform the public; entertain and persuade	Educate communities about the issue, the product being studied, or the trial	Write materials showing the human face of the issue, provide a news hook that brings in a community perspective
Sell papers or advertizing time	Undertake a trial efficiently and ethically; gain visibility for the institution or the issue studied	Offer compelling quotes, an interesting angle, and eye-catching photo opportunities from your site or an event
Reflect the views and opinions of society	Change society by developing new tools to prevent or treat disease, or new public health interventions	Demonstrate that research teams and opinion leaders care about big issues like justice, ethics, and health
Focus on short-term or high-profile events	Focus on longer-term health goals; build long-term research literacy in the community	Suggest story angles that link your research or main message to a current event or to a timeless health issue such as maternal mortality
Present a number of varying opinions	Present accurate messages that convey the importance of the research and the issue studied	Listen to concerns; calmly but directly address misinformation or misrepresentations; communicate science clearly
Seek the truth	Provide an accurate view of a continuously changing trial or evolving scientific issue	Contextualize research to promote understanding of complex issues

Source: Contrast between mass media and public health goals. In: Nelson DE, Brownson RC, Remington PL, Parvanta C, eds. Communicating public health information—a guide for practitioners. Washington (DC): American Public Health Association; 2002.

There are many reasons why the press may want to talk to you. For example:

- They need background information on a subject.
- You work on issues that are currently making the news.
- They need to quote an expert to add credibility to their story.
- They are looking for details about a crisis situation related to your organization (Hurt 2004).
- They may even want to write a negative story and use your comments to legitimize their perspective.

Box 9.2. Have a clear message to tell us

By Kanya Ndaki, Deputy Editor of PlusNews, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

There is definitely a hunger for information about clinical results among the public. Researchers sometimes mistakenly assume that their work isn't necessarily of interest to the average person. But trials are conducted on the ordinary man on the street. Trial participants are ordinary people. So it's important to know how these trial results affect us, what the implications are.

As a researcher, however, you have got to have a very clear message. It's no use inviting a journalist to a clinical site to speak to participants if you're not clear about what it is you want the journalist to take away with them. You've got to communicate your message effectively or else the journalist can come in, see these women as "guinea pigs," and interpret the trial completely differently.

Why you may want to talk to the press

Media play a critical role in your communications efforts. Responsible journalists, like responsible scientists, take their role very seriously. Scientists and journalists both seek knowledge and want to communicate their findings to the public.

Journalists can help scientists:

- Demonstrate the benefits of particular public health policies
- Encourage health policymakers to take new data into account when revising practice guidelines
- Reassure the public and address rumors (Shepherd 2005)
- Increase community access to information on health innovations
- Encourage community members to participate in a study or health program
- Articulate obstacles to health services
- Model healthy behaviors such as responsible parenthood (Smith 1995)
- Spur greater allocation of funds or government support for research on the topic you study

For these reasons, researchers should look for opportunities to work with the news media.

Guideline 2. Scientists can help to frame stories about clinical research. All stories are "framed" in a particular way. When a journalist writes a story, he or she takes a particular angle and frames the story to reflect certain themes. For example, a story about research on childhood immunizations could have a public health frame (immunizations save lives), an exploitation frame (outsiders are experimenting on our children), or an economic frame (preventing illness saves money in the long run).

Remember that how you frame a story should be grounded in reality. Learning how to frame a story is a valuable skill, but if your frame is merely spin—telling the story in a one-sided way to promote yourself or some agenda—your story will lose steam fast. For example, if your highly anticipated study results show that a promising new vaccine did not work, professional reporters will see through efforts to frame the results in a positive light.

The community of Vulindlela, South Africa, one of the sites of the CAPRISA 004 tenofovir gel trial.

Elizabeth T. Robinson/FHI

Box 9.3. Giving journalists the right information at the right time

By Salim Abdool Karim, MBChB, PhD, Director of CAPRISA, Nelson R Mandela School of Medicine at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

I did my first microbicide clinical trial in 1994. Fifteen years later I'm still learning. One thing I've gained in my experiences is that the media—particularly print media and the radio—are amazingly powerful allies. They really have such an important role to play in informing and in educating people about HIV/AIDS.

We shouldn't let the occasional blip sully any of that relationship. They do a superb job. Our task as researchers is just to ensure that we provide them with the kinds of information that contribute to improving the public's understanding of what we're trying to do and where we're trying to go.

As a scientist, I know we have breakthroughs all the time, but they are often miniscule. They are barely a single step of one of the four legs of a tortoise. You can't be going around all the time to the newspapers and saying 'This is really newsworthy.' Rather, you have to wait for there to be big news and something worthwhile putting in the news.

Be aware of the underlying narrative in media coverage about the health issue you are studying. Position yourself so that you can guide journalists toward frames that will help them portray your study accurately, while satisfying media criteria for newsworthiness (see Box 9.4).

Box 9.4. What makes a story newsworthy?

Journalists and editors use a set of criteria to help them decide what is newsworthy—information, topics, or events that are interesting enough to report to the public. A subject is often considered newsworthy only if it meets at least two of the following criteria:

- **Timing:** Is the story providing brand new information? Is it current?
- **Proximity:** Is the story local?
- **Uniqueness:** Is the information distinct or unusual?
- **Significance:** Are many people affected? Does the information concern people personally?
- **Timeliness:** Is the material being released at a conference or some other event?
- **Permanence:** Is it timeless or enduring (topics such as adolescent pregnancy)?
- **Prominence:** Is the event or person well known?
- **Context:** Does your story relate to bigger issues, such as national health priorities?
- **Human interest:** Does the material inspire human interest, sympathy, or humor?

Guideline 3. Be alert for negative coverage. Pay attention to the emotional content—especially fear, anger, skepticism, or dread—of recent media coverage on your research subject. For example, if you were about to begin a trial and saw this quote in a local paper, consider how it would affect your approach to the local media:

> "The prostitutes of Cameroon live like dogs, but some of them have been offered something that's worse: the life of a laboratory rat, without much compensation, without much explanation, and, above all, without any guarantee that they'll come out of it alive or at any rate as healthy as they were before they were recruited (Ramazzotti 2005)."

The exploitation frame employed by this reporter plays on readers' emotions and sense of outrage. The specific messages conveyed are that research is inherently exploitative, and that voluntary participation in clinical trials among vulnerable populations is impossible (Mack and others 2010).

To counter a negative frame, one must address the audience's underlying feelings, while providing an alternative perspective. You might point out, for example, that scientists who are dedicated to improving public health are working with the community to prevent HIV and save lives among those most affected by the pandemic.

Guideline 4. Reporters can be important sources for scientists. Although scientists can be sources for reporters, sometimes the roles are reversed. You can glean important information by paying attention to the questions that reporters ask.

For example, if a reporter starts probing about rumors that blood draws (such as samples taken for HIV tests) are being sold or used for satanic rituals, it could prompt you to explore whether similar ideas are circulating in the community where you are recruiting participants. Likewise, if a reporter's question indicates confusion about basic scientific concepts, it can alert you to pay special attention to explaining those concepts clearly in future interviews with local reporters, as well as in discussions with community stakeholders.

YouthNet/FHI

Reporters' questions can provide insight into issues that need clarification in the wider community.

Box 9.5. Beware of the media's trigger vocabulary

By Natasha Mack, PhD, Linguistic Anthropologist, Family Health International

Repeated messages do not need to be supported by evidence to be believed by the public. Once people have formed a strong opinion, new evidence is generally made to fit, contrary information is typically filtered out, ambiguous information is interpreted as a confirmation, and consistent information—even through the repetition of inaccuracies or misinformation—is seen as "proof positive," making such messages virtually impossible to correct later (Shepherd 2005).

Words and phrases used repeatedly to talk about a given theme can help frame or shape the perception of a trial's ethics, often tapping into an underlying cultural narrative or discourse on research exploitation. Media persistently use science exploitation and negative discourses on HIV as "frames" for their stories, drawing on familiar stereotypes, interpretations, and storylines in ready-made formulas (Kitzinger 2000).

For example, media coverage in 2005 on the oral tenofovir trial in Cameroon tapped into public emotions about exploitation through the use of trigger phrases such as "guinea pigs" that instantly tell audiences to interpret a news story as yet another exploitation narrative. Our search of the term "guinea pig" in PubMed (1950 to present) and other databases located academic and news articles laced with similarly charged vocabulary, including "torture," "Nazi Germany," "conspiracy," and "Tuskegee." In using trigger vocabulary, the media and the HIV activists it quoted aligned the news stories of the Cameroon trial with other narratives about global exploitation in clinical research (Jones 1993).

Researchers who work in places where the media use negative frames or trigger words should make it clear that they are working for the benefit of trial participants and others at risk. Speaking with candor and integrity about their motivations for improving public health is a powerful antidote to negative messages.

Adapted from: N Mack et al. The Exploitation of "Exploitation" in the Tenofovir PrEP Trial in Cameroon: Lessons Learned from Media Coverage of an HIV Prevention Trial. Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics (JERHRE). In press, June 2010.

By speaking with reporters on a regular basis, you can stay current on what the media are paying attention to. Their questions often reflect society's latest interests and trends. You can strengthen your communications by adapting your key messages to address issues or draw comparisons to topics that are of interest to reporters.

Whenever I do media trainings with our researchers, I prepare our team to answer questions in the context of what's happening currently in our field. For example, when we released trial results just after the former South African Health Minister passed away, we anticipated that media would ask questions about this timely event. We prepared messages that linked her legacy to the need for ongoing HIV research, allowing us to respond to current events while staying focused on our key messages about the study results.

—Will Mapham, Communications and Advocacy Director, Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit, the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

II Developing a media strategy

Your media strategy addresses how and when you deliver your key messages and other information to members of the press. A media strategy is just one part of the overall communications plan for a trial (see Chapter 3). Your media strategy will:

- Identify how you plan to involve news media before, during, and after the trial, and which approaches you plan to use (see Box 9.6).
- Outline standard operating procedures (SOPs) for interactions with the media (see section III of this chapter for more on media SOPs).
- Identify key messages to convey to different types of media.
- Specify plans for monitoring media coverage.
- Outline processes to respond to misinformation in media coverage.
- Establish when to proactively seek news coverage.

Lisa Rossi/MTN

Prof. Salim Abdool Karim addresses news media at the Microbicides 2008 Conference in New Delhi, India.

Box 9.6. Approaches for sharing information through news media

Approach	Purpose	Tips
Press conference/ media briefing	• Announce a new discovery, publication, or launch of a major new program. • Draw attention to an urgent situation.	• Invite journalists from many different outlets, including community radio, print publications, Internet sites, and television programs. • If the press briefing is at your study site, consider including a tour of the facilities after the briefing. Visuals are important, especially for television news media. • Identify key spokespersons available for interviews, since many journalists will want to do follow-up interviews. If your site community speaks multiple languages, make sure to include spokespersons fluent in those languages who can speak with local media. Consider including respected community members and other third-party validators.
Press kits	• Provide short materials and background information for a story. The press release is the main document, which can be supplemented by fact sheets, Q&As, visual aids, reports, and biographies of experts.	• Prepare press kits for journalists whenever you do a press briefing or invite journalists to attend an event. Keep the information concise and easy to scan. If you are launching a lengthy report, include copies of the executive summary only. • When possible, translate key materials (press release, fact sheets) into the local language. This can prevent misinterpretation of scientific terms and sensitive issues. • Include contact information for spokespeople in case reporters have follow-up questions.
Telephone calls to reporters or editors	• Alert reporters to a breaking news story, such as upcoming trial results or other announcements. • Follow up on a press release or invitation to an upcoming event. • Inform reporters or editors of errors and ask for a correction to be printed.	• If possible, give reporters adequate notice. For example, do not wait until the day before your study releases results to contact journalists. • Do not assume that because you sent a press release the reporter has seen it or has had time to read it. • Always leave a telephone number where they can reach you, preferably both an office and a mobile number. • Start by asking if they have time to talk. If they are on deadline and busy, ask when you can call back. • Be prepared to say everything you need to say very quickly—get right to the point.

Press release/press statement	• Provide the key elements—What, Why, When, Where, and How—of a story. • Offer reporters a news hook, as well as compelling quotes, statistics, or concepts to help frame the story. • Use proactively for announcing new published data, trial results, or a surprising development that affects the field as a whole. • Use to support or respond to an announcement or situation in the field. • Promote transparency of the research, especially when an unexpected change or trial closure takes place.	• You can distribute press releases many different ways depending on whether and how much media you are seeking. Consider using a wire service if you want to make sure many media outlets see your statement, or opt to post it on your organization's Web site if you are not actively seeking coverage. • A press release should be factual. Never overstate or oversell. • Always be sure to proofread your press release for grammatical mistakes or misspelled words.
Opinion pieces/ op-ed columns	• Express a strong opinion about an issue with local impact. These are typically written and signed by a prominent person or expert or by a group of organizations.	• News editors are looking for op-ed pieces that say something new or provide a fresh perspective.
Letters to the editor	• Reinforce the importance of a published story. • Present an alternative to the opinion put forward by the person quoted in a story • Point out and correct an important mistake.	• Keep letters short, concise, and fresh. Do not repeat and reinforce negative information. • Be professional, especially if you are responding to an inaccuracy or inflammatory accusation. • When correcting an error, consider whether a telephone call would be more appropriate and effective or if both responses are necessary.
Social media	• Reach out to new influencers and global stakeholders through online media tools and sites, including blogs. • Share information, especially on topics where you would like feedback or to engage in an online dialogue. • Provide short updates that do not require much detail or explanation.	• Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, make it easy for readers to share your content with others in their networks. If your stakeholders are online, you may want to be as well. • Be aware of the risks involved and be careful to monitor any social media tools you use, as naysayers are just as likely to engage as supporters.

To develop a media strategy:

Step 1. You need to know how the people you might want to reach receive information. Reviewing your environmental scan should provide you with this information and can inform your media strategy. You should seek to answer the following questions:

- How do most people in your trial community get news—from local sources (such as newspapers or community radio shows) or from other media outlets (such as national or international television news)?

Clinical trial sites are increasingly using social media to help reach potential participants and other stakeholders involved in the research movement. For the HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN), sites such as Facebook are valuable tools for keeping their constituencies informed and engaged.

Tweets (at left) from the Twitter Web site are used to convey information on the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections.

- Which newspaper do national policymakers read?
- Do international advocates who follow your study rely on Internet blogs and postings for updates?

Step 2. Identify health journalists and keep an updated media list. Identifying the journalists who write about issues relevant to your trial is very important. To do so:

- Read the local and national newspapers, and take note of which journalists cover health and related issues.
- Review the journalists and media outlets in your stakeholders' lists and identify any gaps.
- Identify local radio and television reporters who cover health issues on their shows.

Step 3. Know which media outlets can best address your communications goals. For example, if you want to update policymakers, a national newspaper may be the best way to spread your message. On the other hand, if you are targeting young people, you may be better off approaching a television program or an Internet source. To reach a rural community in local languages, you might try grassroots media (see Box 9.8). Consult Box 9.6 for general guidance on what type of media approach might be best suited for a particular situation.

Box 9.7. Characteristics of different types of media

Type of Media	Characteristics (reach, audience, accessibility)
Print media—newspapers and magazines	• Influential people, such as politicians and policymakers, will often turn to print media for their news • Intended for the general public
Radio	• Available to a broad audience • Suitable if you want to communicate local information • Has an entertainment function but is also a venue for serious discussions • Strong ability for interaction with call-in shows
Television	• May be a medium for serious news or for entertainment, depending on the outlet; some talk shows and news broadcasts are intended to entertain rather than to inform • Not as accessible as radio • Requires strong visuals to be effective
Internet—online media, blogs, and social media	• Limited accessibility in developing countries • Can quickly disseminate (accurate or inaccurate) information globally

Step 4. Adapt your media strategy to each milestone in your study. Your media strategy will vary at different stages in your study. For example, the team may decide to post a press statement on your Web site for your study launch. The same team may implement a broader, more proactive media outreach effort to announce trial results, including contacting key media allies one-on-one or hosting a press conference.

Respect local circumstances when deciding on media strategies. For multisite and network-sponsored studies, remember that different sites may share a communications plan but decide on different media strategies. Coordinate, collaborate, and communicate with partners throughout the process—not only when you respond to a crisis.

Adapt your materials to fit your strategy—not the other way around. For example, if your site decides to invite local-language media to visit your site, make sure you have materials in the local language that are ready and available for them.

Dr. Morenike Ukpong, Coordinator of the New Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Society (NVMAS), uses a mix of approaches to communicate with advocates in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Elizabeth T. Robinson/FHI

Box 9.8. Using grassroots media

By Junaid Seedat, Former Senior Program Officer in Communication, Information and Education for the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative

Scientists don't always spend energy talking to the media closest to the people and the communities we're working with. South Africa has an incredible history with community radio, and yet rarely do you see people in new prevention technologies actually engaging community radio, community theatre, or community media. I think that if we want to have the media support our efforts, we need to focus on community media as well as mainstream media. As researchers, our focus tends to be on journalists we can take for coffee or out to dinner, those who are close to our homes and don't cause us any inconvenience. I think that the whole issue around guinea pigs and other sensationalist issues is based on the community members who just weren't well informed. Research teams need to train media spokespersons who speak the local language and invest in developing materials that are simplified while remaining accurate and respectful to community audiences. The best way to fight against sensationalism originating in communities is to use community-based media.

Step 5. Choose your messengers wisely. We trust news from people we identify with—make sure to use the right spokespeople for each audience and each situation.

Take context into account. In many circumstances, the site spokesperson can deliver a statement and talk with media directly. However, there may be times when it is most appropriate for an announcement to come directly from the sponsor or the trial's principal investigator, who may not be based at your site.

Recruit third-party spokespeople who have high-level standing in the community or who are unusual sources, so that people pay attention.

Box 9.9. Sample media monitoring grid

News outlet	Piece published/date	Comments
Nairobi Star (Kenya)	Nurses set to join circumcision team (4 Aug 2009)	Written by a reporter who attended media training event we organized.
Daily Monitor (Uganda)	Cost of male circumcision prevents wider use in Uganda (29 July 2009)	Balanced coverage, discusses our trial and quotes local leaders.
PlusNews (international)	Male circumcision brings Swazi men to clinic (5 Dec 2009)	Positive tone. Says 92% of men who seek MC agree to HIV testing

Step 6. Incorporate media monitoring. Monitoring the media coverage of your study and of the field in which you work is an essential element of any media strategy. (See Box 9.9 for a sample media monitoring grid or download the template.)

Each site should establish a process for tracking, monitoring, and sharing media coverage.

Monitor relevant local, national, and international media daily. Delegate someone to track information about the field in general, not only your study or specific area of research. Remember that all trials can affect each other, particularly if negative media coverage appears.

Keep in mind that editorials and letters to the editor are among the most often read sections of newspapers. If a highly inaccurate or negative piece is published, consider responding directly or ask colleagues with credibility in public health circles to do so.

Monitor a variety of sources, including list servers, social networking sites, and blogs. Ask close colleagues who read this type of media to alert you to any coverage of your trial. Although these sources generally have lower circulation than other types of media, inaccuracies can still circulate and spread misconceptions about your study.

Radio and TV can be challenging to monitor. At times, media interviews are only used days

after being recorded, or they can be used multiple times for different stories. Whenever possible, try to get the full transcript or recording. This will assist in situations that may require a response, especially if you think you were misquoted.

To monitor international coverage of related research, consider setting up a Google News Alert (see Box 9.11). Subscribing to high-quality news digests, such as the Kaiser Daily HIV/AIDS Report, is another option for people with regular Internet access.

Your team should intensify monitoring efforts during times of announcements or major events in the field. Some days, few articles appear in the press, and the monitoring only takes a few minutes. However, when results are released, the press may be filled with stories about your trial or relevant trials. During these times, you should consider assigning more than one person to the task of monitoring media and pointing out inaccuracies. Another increasingly common option is to hire a local media firm to coordinate these efforts.

YouthNet/FHI

In many countries, community radio is a key source of information for community members.

The local staff can be an invaluable resource in the effort to track coverage. For example, one clinical trial site investigator kept hearing about articles her staff had noticed in the newspaper. She implemented a policy that anyone who saw an article about the study should buy a copy of the newspaper, get a receipt, and bring both in for reimbursement. By offering to reimburse people, staff members became willing to bring in articles. This helped the study to improve its media monitoring efforts.

Learn about the news cycle—the amount of time between the release of editions from a news outlet. The most common example of a news cycle is the daily newspaper, which is typically released early each morning. That 24-hour period between daily editions constitutes a news cycle. Pay attention to reprinted articles or the dissemination of adaptations of previously distributed material. Although a newspaper or radio story might originally appear in one source, it will likely travel to other sources if it is a compelling piece. For example, a story in a local newspaper may eventually show up in national newspapers, radio, television, or the Internet. This kind of redistribution occurs with both positive and negative coverage.

Respond to inaccuracies in the media, as needed. If you find inaccurate coverage of your trial in the media, contact the source and politely correct the information, without being condescending or defensive. Ask them to print a correction; if the article is online, have them remove any inaccurate information from their Web site.

Correcting information in a professional manner will help establish a relationship between you and the media source. Eventually, the journalist may start going directly to your research team for information.

Box 9.10. What every site should know about responding to Internet media

International online media coverage has quickened the pace and broadened the circulation of news about clinical trials, especially announcements about study results. While your site's main communications activities will be largely interpersonal in nature, you should pay close attention to online media coverage of your study. Start setting aside resources and time to monitor and respond to Internet postings. Here are some tips to get started:

Gear up. Sensational news coverage on the Internet can occur at any time of day or night. The communications and media point person for your trial site should have reliable access to the Internet, both at the trial site and from home. This may mean budgeting to purchase a laptop or telephone with Internet access, or identifying other ways to stay connected, such as having a reimbursement policy for using an Internet café during weekends and holidays.

Use your global networks to monitor media around the clock. When announcements or results are expected, make a plan with your partners across the world. Designate point people to make sure that media is being monitored 24 hours a day and that news coverage is quickly shared with your communications team.

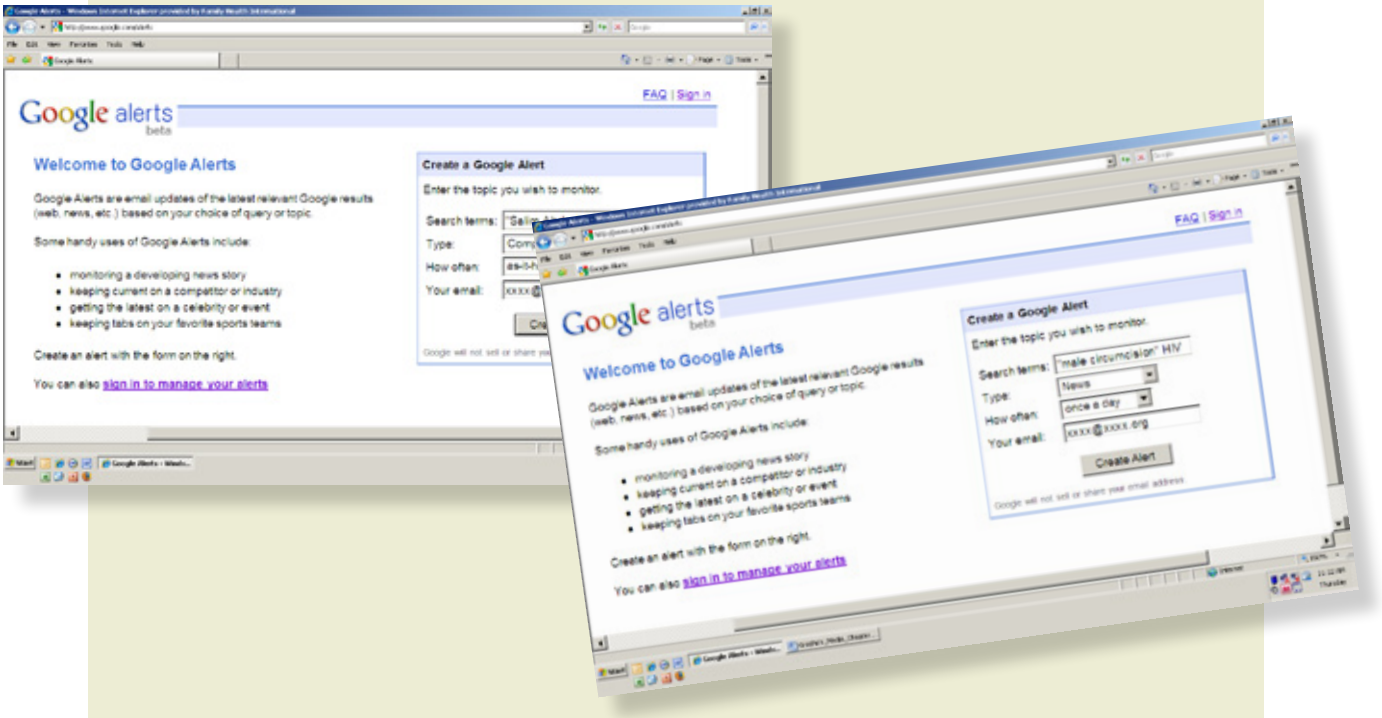
Respond quickly. Be prepared to respond swiftly to inaccurate or inflammatory coverage online on major Internet sites. Do not lose time writing something new. Adapt your key messages and prepared materials to quickly compose an online correction or response. Typically, it is not feasible or advisable to respond to small-circulation blog postings or defamatory Web sites—for example, to AIDS denialists or anti-research groups. However, if a negative blog has possible links to local news outlets, it is important to take these posts seriously. Even if you do not respond to the blog, you might want to consider what could be done locally to counteract the false claims being made. When negative postings are picked up by other online news outlets and spread widely, you will likely need to respond.

Call and correct errors. If an article is posted on a legitimate online news Web site, there should be an editor's contact e-mail and telephone number available. At first notice of an inaccuracy, fallacy, or breach of embargo, call the editor and ask for a correction or removal of the link, if appropriate.

Avoid character debates. If the coverage is a blog, social media, or list server posting, be careful about seeming defensive or engaging in a personal debate. Even if you or your professional work is personally attacked, remain formal and professional in your written correspondence. Refute the inaccuracies, use the facts from your existing materials, and direct people to your Web site or other high-quality resources for more information.

Box 9.11. How to set up a Google news alert

It is easy to set up "Google Alerts" that tell you of any new online media coverage. By entering key words, you can have Google automatically generate a list of current articles that are relevant to your study and deliver them to your e-mail in-box. You can set up multiple alerts if you want to be informed anytime there is news on the topics you select. Here is what to do:



1. First, go to www.google.com/alerts.
2. Under "Search terms," type in the name of the topic, person, trial site, or other item about which you would like to receive news. (Tip: When searching for a term with more than one word, use quotations for more accurate searching, such as "cholera vaccine.")
3. You can select "News" if you would like to receive only things posted to proper news Web sites. For other online sources of information, you can select "Blogs," "Web," "Video," or "Groups." Selecting "Comprehensive" will ensure that you receive notification when your search term shows up on any of these online sources.
4. Select how often you want to receive notification.
5. Enter your e-mail address. (Note: You do not need to have an account with Google to set up Google Alerts.)
6. Log in to your e-mail account to verify the request from Google Alerts. You will start receiving news immediately.

Communicating via broadcast media is a skill that requires cultivation and practice. Reviewing tapes of practice interviews can be very helpful.

Jennifer Heslop-Spencer/ The Aurum Institute

III Responding to media requests

Your team should establish a basic protocol for handling media inquiries. Some teams may find it helpful to create a media SOP to make sure that the staff handles media inquiries in a consistent manner (see Appendix 9.2). Other teams may prefer to have a less formal policy regarding media inquiries.

Keep the following things in mind when developing your media SOP:

- Designate one or two site-level staff members to handle all media inquiries. Identify a back-up person for times when the designated staff members are not available.
- Assign roles and responsibilities to those who will be responsible for interacting with the media. List the steps that the administrative staff should take if a reporter calls. Decide whether the designated contact staff member or spokesperson will schedule media inter-

views. Determine who will facilitate interviews with external allies and third-party experts when journalists ask for sources they can contact.

- Clarify your site's policy on media interviews with trial participants and Community Advisory Board members and your position on allowing reporters to access the site for tours.
- Create a checklist of questions to ask journalists. This short list should help the spokesperson gather relevant information about the reporter and the article to be written, such as the name of the publication, details about the interview, and the deadline. In some cases, the spokesperson may want this information before agreeing to commit to an interview.

Box 9.12. Questions to ask journalists

About the journalist

- ☐ Name? _____
- ☐ Who do you work for? Publication? _____
- ☐ Office number / mobile number? _____
- ☐ Email? _____

About the story

- ☐ What's the story about? _____
- ☐ Who do you want to interview? [*Investigator, community member, participants*] _____
- ☐ Who else are you interviewing? _____
- ☐ Do you have/need backgrounder information? _____

Logistics

- ☐ What's your deadline? _____
- ☐ What times are good for you? [*If scheduling for someone else, get a few options*] _____
- ☐ If TV or radio, what's the format? Live or recorded? _____
- ☐ Call-in questions? _____

- Use Google to find out information about the journalist. Google is a good tool to help you find out some quick background about the journalist and his or her publication. By conducting a simple search, you can often find articles the journalist has written, the reputation of their publication, and other relevant details (see Box 9.13).

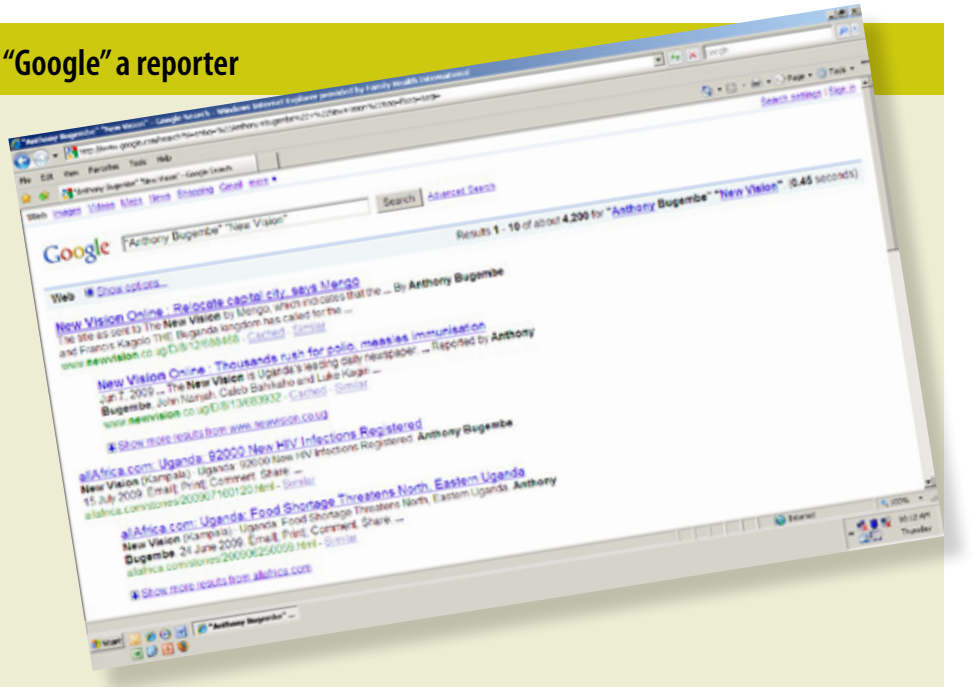
Once you have written your SOP for media requests, put it into action whenever requests come in.

Brief the spokesperson. If the person who handles media inquiries is not the official spokesperson, make sure that he or she provides background information about the journalist to the spokesperson.

Inform the sponsor or network communications team about media inquiries. Determine whether your site has a protocol in place that explains when to notify network- or sponsor-level communications staff members. Some sponsors want to be informed when international journalists contact a site, whereas others may wish to be notified about all media inquiries.

Learn the lingo. Just as scientists have a specialized vocabulary, journalists have a language of their own. Knowing some of this terminology can help you communicate with reporters, especially when they call with a request for a quick "sound bite" or ask you to speak "off the record." (See Box 9.14.) If you do not fully understand what the journalist is saying, ask for a clarification before you respond.

Box 9.13. How to "Google" a reporter



Follow these steps for using Google to find information about individual journalists:

1. Go to www.google.com. If your country has a local Google home page, use that instead. For example, if you are based in Zimbabwe, use www.google.co.zw.
2. Enter the name—in quotation marks—of the reporter who just called to request an interview. If the first results are not returning news stories, try also entering the name of the journal.
3. Click on recent entries to get a sense of the journalist's general tone, accuracy, and command of scientific language. This will help you know how much you will need to simplify explanations of research processes or concepts.

Box 9.14. Important terminology related to news media

B-roll	This is film footage that can be used as background images for television news or films. It is useful to have high-quality film footage of your clinic or project available, especially in the case of a major announcement when a television news program may request b-roll to accompany a story on your study for the nightly news.
Deadline	Deadlines in journalism are strict and final. Unlike other fields, there are no extensions or second chances as the deadline means that the paper is going to print or the news is going on the air. When journalists say they are on deadline, respect their time frame.
Embargo	Scientific journals and medical conferences often have strict embargo policies that stipulate the date and time when information issued to the media may be released to the public. If news is under embargo, journalists cannot publish or air the news until the stated time. Embargoes can be useful for both journalists and scientists, because they allow key journalists to access information prior to its public announcement. This provides them enough time to do a good job reporting the story without ruining the surprise. Reporters who regularly cover science and medicine generally respect embargoes. Embargoes are a professional standard in certain contexts, but mean little in other settings.
Exclusive	An exclusive interview or story means that you have established an understanding with a particular journalist to not share the story with any other journalists, at least until after the story is published. Providing journalists with exclusive information can be useful in certain situations and help foster relationships based on mutual trust and respect.
Frame	How the story is presented—who defines the issue and what views are expressed.
News hook	Hooks are the components of a news story that make it interesting to the reader, such as immediacy, timeliness, controversy, effect on a local population, or dramatic human interest. When considering whether to pursue your story, reporters consider whether there is a news hook.
"No comment"	This is a dangerous phrase said to reporters in moments of panic—try to avoid it. Saying "no comment" often suggests that you are either hiding something or you are uninformed and incompetent. Instead, turn a question around and respond with a key message or simply say, "This is not my area of expertise . . . I can only speak about my work on . . ."
On/off the record	These terms can mean different things to different reporters. However, you should assume that everything you say to a reporter is on the record, meaning that it could be used in an article and attributed to you. Do not be tempted to say things off the record. If you cannot say it on the record, you really should not be saying it.
Pitch	To suggest a story idea to news reporters, producers, or editors.
Sound bite	Short, attention-getting quote that communicates the gist of your message.

Adapted from: Bray R. 2000. SPIN Works! A Media Guidebook for Communicating Values and Shaping Opinion. San Francisco, CA: The Spin Project, Independent Media Institute.

There are times when a reporter may catch you off guard, for example at an event or conference. If a reporter asks to interview you, do not feel pressured to do the interview at that time. To manage an impromptu encounter:

- Determine the journalist's deadline and see whether you can arrange to be interviewed at another time, even if only 20 minutes later, so that you have time to organize your thoughts.
- Identify the topic of the story.
- Ask if the reporter has conducted any other interviews and with whom.
- Take some time to organize your thoughts and jot down your key messages.
- If possible, talk to others whom the reporter has interviewed and find out what questions the journalist asked.

IV Getting your message across

Several techniques can help you convey your message even when you are asked a difficult question. In these situations, take a deep breath and remember that you are the expert and that you alone control what you say (see Chapter 7). The following strategies can help you stay on message:

Bridging. Bridging is the use of a transitional phrase that allows you to move the direction of the interview into your territory. Bridging words include: and, but, however, in fact, for example, because, and on the other hand. The following sentences provide some examples of the bridging technique:

- "That may have been true in the past; however, this is the way we are doing it today . . ."
- "We are very committed to involving people with HIV/AIDS in Community Advisory Boards. In fact, in the trial X, nearly half of our CAB was made up of HIV-positive women."
- "This new trial will break new ground in the field. For example . . ."

ABC technique. This technique builds on the bridging technique and can help you change the direction of the interview without completely ignoring the tough questions being asked. To use this technique, follow these three steps:

- *Answer* the premise of the question.
- *Bridge* to the most important issues.
- *Communicate* key messages.

By addressing the question even briefly, you will help move the interview on to other topics—where you guide it. (See Box 9.15 for an illustration of how to use this technique.)

Box 9.15. Interview techniques: using the ABC approach

A study testing Product X showed the product barely worked. Why do we need another study on it?

Answer the premise of the questions	**Bridge to the most important issues**	**Communicate key messages**
The previous study on Product X took place in two Asian countries and only included men who have sex with men.	It's important to test Product X in a number of settings and among different populations to determine if it can protect people.	Our study is testing safety and effectiveness of Product X in women who live in several of the countries in Africa most affected by HIV.

Flagging. Flagging uses phrases that emphasize the importance of your messages. They tell the reporter—your audience—what should be highlighted.

Box 9.16. How to get your message across using flagging

By Annette Larkin, Public Relations Consultant, CONRAD, Washington, DC

When conducting media trainings, I always tell people that if they learn nothing else, they need to take away how to effectively flag key messages during an interview. Why? Because there's nothing more important in an interview than getting your three or four key messages into a story, whether it's print, radio, or broadcast. Despite what the reporter is asking, if you do almost nothing but repeat your key messages in a way that forces the reporter to listen, your messages will likely be included in the story.

Follow these guidelines before and during your interview:

- First, tailor your messages to your audience—think about who will read or listen to the story and make sure your messages are what they need to know, with the appropriate language.
- Make sure your messages are concise—if they are too long and hard to understand, the reporter may have difficulty using them in the story.
- Limit yourself to three or four key messages.
- Repeat these messages several times, throughout the interview. Repetition helps drill your messages in.
- Finally, use these phrases to introduce your messages:
  - "Let me tell you the three most important things you need to know . . ."
  - "The key issues are as follows . . . 1, 2, 3"
  - "The main points are . . ."

V Being interviewed by the media

An interview is not a conversation. It is an opportunity to deliver a carefully crafted message about your work. Preparation is essential.

Prepare for interviews ahead of time.

- Familiarize yourself with the journalist and the media outlet. Do some research to learn about the other news stories the journalist has written for print, radio, or television (see Box 9.13).
- Determine the format of the interview. If you are doing a radio and TV interview, find out whether the interview will be done live or recorded, and how long it will be. Short, live interviews do not allow for any retakes, while longer interviews that are recorded can be edited and, therefore, can be much more forgiving.
- Know your key messages. Be prepared to reiterate these messages in as many answers as you can. Briefly respond to the question, then bridge to your key message (see Chapter 7).
- Know what you want to say in advance, and prepare compelling quotes. Reporters look for quotes from scientists that summarize the impact of a research finding or policy decision and why it is important. Describe in short sentences what is at stake. Explain in easy-to-understand language what this discovery means for our understanding of the disease, the causal agent, and public health.
- Do a mock interview with a colleague. Being able to practice your message before the interview can boost your confidence and help you feel prepared to answer any question that may come your way.
- Check the news to make sure you know about any late-breaking events that might affect your remarks.

Give a clear and memorable interview.

- Be direct. Keep your answers short, simple, and to the point.

Media training can help prepare trial spokespersons to communicate effectively with reporters in crisis situations.

Trial staff from the Africa Centre in Mtubatuba, South Africa, practice communications skills during a media training.

Deborah Baron/PATH

- Do not use jargon or acronyms. Describe your project in language that anyone can understand. Assume that the reporter and his or her audience know very little about clinical trials.
- Use active language. "More than 3,000 women participated in the study" is stronger than "The study had more than 3,000 women." Drop the passive language and make your language move with active verbs.
- Stay professional. Your undisciplined remark can and will make news. If you do misspeak or have an outburst, deal with it immediately. You might say, "Let me clarify that . . . " Always appear confident and friendly. Never become angry or attack a reporter who is asking you questions. It is his or her job to dig for an interesting story.

Media training is important, and as scientists, we don't have enough of it. During the Phambili HIV vaccine trial, a colleague sat with me and grilled me about the details of the study. It was incredibly helpful. The questions she asked me were far harder than those really asked by journalists, so I felt prepared when it came time to talk to a reporter. Training and support of scientists is important, and individual coaching is incredibly useful.

—By Dr. Glenda Gray, MBBCH, FCP, Co-director, Perinatal HIV Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

- Stay honest. Bluffing, exaggerating, or lying is a recipe for disaster. Do not say more than what you had planned. If you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to, you can say, "That is a very important question, but not within my area of expertise. What I can say is . . . " You can also suggest another source who may be able to respond to the question, or offer to find out and get back to the reporter.
- Represent your organization. Make sure that what you say is your organization's public position.
- Avoid accepting or confirming a negative question. For example:

  Q: "Don't you care about whether the women become HIV-positive?"
  This question implies that the questioner suspects you might not care. Negative questions are often asked when a negative answer is suspected. They are used to seek confirmation and agreement.

  A: "The safety and well-being of the women who volunteer for trials is our top priority. That is why we are conducting this HIV prevention research."
- Remember that the microphone or camera is always on. Do not use the phrases "no comment" or "off the record." If you do not want to see it on the front page of tomorrow's paper, then you probably should not say it.
- Talk to your audience, even if you cannot see them. If you are doing a radio interview in a studio or you are talking into a telephone and have never met the interviewer, stay animated and engaged with the conversation. People can "hear" a smile as well as a yawn.
- Pay attention to body language. Much of your message is conveyed through body lan-

guage, emotional tone, and attitude. Therefore, it is important to know when smiling is appropriate, and to avoid appearing smug, arrogant, defensive, or negative.

Follow up with the reporter. This is just as important as performing well during the interview. After an interview, you should:

- Send the reporter an e-mail, thanking her or him for the opportunity to talk about your study and offering to help clarify any remaining questions. Be sure to include your contact information.
- Report back to your communications team. Send a brief summary of the interview to the person on your communications team who is keeping track of media coverage. Include the reporter's contact information, any lessons learned from this interview, or tough questions you were unprepared to answer.
- Send news clips to the study coordinator, communications person, or principal investigator when the article is published. Consider sharing media clips with external stakeholders, such as donors.

React quickly to inaccurate information. This is critical, regardless of the type or size of the media outlet. If you do not address inaccuracies, the same misinformation may continue to resurface in unexpected places.

Box 9.17. Avoid being misquoted

By Dr. Daniel T. Halperin, Lecturer on Global Health, Harvard University School of Public Health

Many scientists are reluctant to talk to reporters for fear that they will be misquoted. This is a valid concern. Sooner or later, it will happen to everyone. However, this is not a reason to avoid talking to the media. There are several things you can to do reduce the chance of being misquoted:

- Conduct interviews over e-mail. This is becoming increasingly common, and it reduces the chance that you will be misrepresented, since your words are provided in writing and you can go back and check what you said.
- Ask reporters how you can help them be sure they get their facts right. Some reporters may offer to send you a draft, or the section that quotes you, or they may call and read to you parts of the story to be sure they have understood the topic correctly.
- Speak slowly and clearly so that you can be easily understood.
- Provide handouts with written information to make sure that the reporter is not relying only on the interview.
- If you think a reporter is not following your points, try to determine if the cause is confusion or deliberate misrepresentation. If you think a reporter is trying to spin your messages in a negative way, you could suggest credible allies in the field to talk with—who will support your work and back up your messages.
- After the interview, follow up by e-mail to reiterate points you think the reporter may not have understood.

Although these tips may not guarantee that you are never misquoted, they will go a long way in preventing misrepresentations.

To correct inaccuracies:

- Call the reporter or editor to request a correction. Online journals can be changed almost immediately. When you find a mistake in an online version of an article written for newspapers or magazines, contact the journalist quickly to request that the article be revised for purposes of accuracy before it goes to print. If it is printed, ask the journalist to print a correction in the next publication.
- Prioritize your corrections. If the article has more than a few inaccuracies, consider selecting the most important factual errors and highlight only those to the journalist. Many journalists will respond to a few errors but may choose to ignore a long list of things to change.
- Write a letter to the editor, or post a comment if the publication is online. Letters to the editor are typically among the most read items in a newspaper. When responding to misinformation, do not repeat the inaccuracy in your letter. Take a positive tone, and keep your letter short—about 150 words if possible. (See Appendix 9.3.) Sometimes it is a good idea to discuss matters with the reporter first.
- Call the paper and ask if you can write an op-ed piece. This is often a good strategy if the article is negative in tone but still factual. The editors may welcome the opportunity to publish a piece that takes a different approach to the same topic.
- Go on local and community radio shows to spread accurate information. Radio news often picks up inaccuracies from print media. Call the station and inform them of the error. They can change their script immediately, so the mistakes are not repeated. Additionally, you can ask for opportunities to speak on the morning or evening news program, where you can share correct information and take call-in questions from the community. This is an excellent chance to address rumors and misinformation, and to set the record straight.

Help reporters put a human face on research.

Pictured here is a young woman and child in Kibera, Kenya.

Jim Daniels

VI Helping journalists write good stories

Knowing what it is that journalists need to get a story published can help you get your views into print. The more you understand the objectives, limitations, and challenges that journalists face, the more you can help a journalist do his or her job better to write accurate and compelling stories.

Here are some tips to help journalists write stories that editors will want to publish.

- Provide an interesting story. Remember that journalists get many press releases every day. Make yours stand out. Do you have an angle that will make reporters want to cover your story?
- Supply the reporter with several sources. One of the main principles of professional journalism is to provide accurate and balanced coverage of a story. At the same time, journalists are usually on tight deadlines and often appreciate any help with additional contacts who

can confirm a story, give them background information, or offer quotes as independent experts.

- Provide photos or ideas for visuals. Competition for space in newspapers and television news is becoming increasingly fierce. Think about the picture you want to see on the front page of the newspaper or on the nightly news. Try to frame your story with a powerful image that will carry a news article. For example:

  When the Global Campaign for Microbicides hosted an HIV Prevention Summit for Women and Girls in Johannesburg, South Africa, attended by the Deputy President, they wanted to make sure the media did not cover the story only from the government's perspective. To help frame the story, they invited 30 teenage girls from a local high school to attend and ask the Deputy President questions about how they could protect themselves as young women. The image of these young women gave the journalists powerful photographs and video footage for their media coverage.

- Provide sound bites. The more you can speak in catchy, short sentences, the more likely you will be quoted. Also, the journalist's job is much easier if she or he does not have to edit

Box 9.18. The importance of reacting quickly to inaccuracies in the media

If you respond to media inaccuracies quickly enough, you can ensure that online versions are corrected by the next day's edition. See below for an example of an overnight change in a story picked up by the Dow Jones Newswire. The "Repeat and Correct" version was published after the trial's communications team contacted an editor at Dow Jones Newswire, which then ran the correction.

Original headline: "AIDS Prevention Drug Fails Wider Tests"

"Repeat and Correct" headline: "AIDS Prevention Drug Studies Inconclusive"

your long sentences. Sound bites are usually one-liners that can include a quick metaphor, example, or a new analogy. They are not clichés, technical statistics, or quotes from other people.

- Provide a well-written and informative press release. A press release should be used only when the content meets news criteria (see Box 9.4). Put your most important information in the headline and the first few paragraphs. If reporters do not see a story immediately, they will stop reading before finding the news you wanted to share. (See Appendices 9.4 and 9.5.)
- Consider adding a training component to your press events. Some sites have found it useful to invite journalists to attend a half-day briefing and information session before a press conference where an announcement will be made. These training opportunities give scientists the chance to provide an overview of how clinical trials work, background on specific interventions or research in the field, and context for the announcement to come. Likewise, it gives journalists, especially those new to health issues, opportunities to ask general questions about research and strengthen their scientific understanding more broadly.

VII Nurturing relationships with the media

Scientists can take an active role in communicating with the press by building relationships and becoming a trusted source. All reporters have sources—people who keep them informed so they can do their job. Becoming a reliable source should be one of your priorities with the media.

By developing a working relationship with a reporter, you create an open channel to update journalists on research in your field. This could include drawing attention to a new trial, providing context about policy developments, or providing updates on the microbicide field.

Your ongoing contact with reporters will help make sure they have the information they need to do their job. However, do not confuse being friendly with the media with being friends. Building trust with a reporter is founded on a healthy respect for our different roles.

> *I've developed a relationship with certain researchers and advocates in the country. So when something happens, they fill me in. They take time to brief me because they know I'm interested and they know I'd like to cover the issues. Building these relationships has taken a lot of time, but it's very important to cultivate a relationship with researchers because as a journalist, you have the challenge of trying to keep the story fresh and keeping it on the agenda.*
>
> —Kanya Ndaki, Deputy Editor of PlusNews (IRIN)

To become a source for reporters:

- Return calls quickly and respect deadlines.
- Make yourself available—call reporters, provide positive feedback when you read an insightful story, and create opportunities for the press to learn about your study.

- Know the issues, both about your study and the field.
- Provide written background materials that summarize your key messages.
- Be a resource—put reporters in touch with other experts and suggest ways they can find more information about the issue.
- Stay in touch. Keep journalists up to date on new developments in the field.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep, such as providing an exclusive story.

Box 9.19. Understanding media constraints is a key to being a trusted source

By Dr. Francois Venter, President of the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society, Clinical Director of the University of Witwatersrand's Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit, South Africa

I cultivate relationships with reporters, and I usually have a good relationship with at least one journalist at each major paper, television station, and radio station. When I interact with them, I make sure they know I understand the media constraints. I do not provide long-winded comments, because I know they will not be easy to incorporate into an article. I make sure that the stories I suggest are actual stories, not just dry press releases or bragging about my fabulous project. If I put out a press statement, I am prepared to be phoned that same day and am ready to give off-the-cuff comments. I also make sure to provide context information to help the journalists add depth to their reporting. For me, making sure that I am familiar with the media constraints is key to being a trusted source. It is what keeps the journalists coming back to talk with me.

A "trusted source" has a proactive relationship with one or more journalists and may be called on for their opinion about many aspects of the health field. If you have cultivated a good relationship with a journalist, you may become one of their regular sources. Trusted sources respond promptly to inquiries, stay well informed and updated on the latest developments in the field, and give clear and accurate information and facts.

Box 9.20. Communicating your passion for the issue

By Mitchell Warren, Executive Director of AVAC: Global Advocacy for HIV Prevention, New York

So much of being a trusted source for reporters comes down to your passion for the issue. Does it make your juices flow? Are you committed to it? As soon as that passion is gone, you are no longer a good communicator, no matter how well trained you are. Training can help you say smart things to the media. But at the end of the day, it's about being accessible to the media, and being open to them. It's being able to say articulate things in a language that they can understand. If you are open to their requests, and if you tell them the truth as best you know it, they will come back to you. A lot of it is just being able to explain your study in a way that makes sense to them and that helps them explain it to their readers.

Box 9.21. When key spokespeople become statesmen for the field

By Pam Norick, Chief of External Relations, International Partnership for Microbicides, Silver Spring, MD

IPM is fortunate to have a Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Zeda Rosenberg, who is one of the recognized spokespersons for the microbicide field. Zeda is often asked to speak or comment on the latest developments in microbicides and HIV prevention research.

Zeda is successful because she is open-minded and recognizes the value of effective communications; yet she is disciplined about sticking to the data she knows to be true. She is supportive of research conducted across the HIV prevention community, and she is careful to comment only on science relevant to microbicide research and development. The HIV prevention community is small, and Zeda's first rule is to do no harm and be respectful.

We on the IPM team support Zeda's role as spokesperson by providing her with two essential tools: data and contextual background. Each time Zeda is asked to speak, we prepare talking points, messages, and background materials on the specific topic as well as the publication or venue. We ensure that she has the information she needs to tell the right story in the right way to the right audience. Along the way, we take time to translate the science for general audiences. Translating science for the public represents a cornerstone toward fostering public support.

Entering an interview with facts and clarity not only makes journalists' lives easier, it makes our spokespeople more relatable, quotable, and popular among all of IPM's audiences.

Key points to remember

- The more you understand how the media works and the challenges reporters face, the easier it will be for you to communicate clear and accurate information about health research to the public.
- Media strategies are an important part of your overall communications plan. Decide how you will involve news media before, during, and after the trial. Select appropriate spokespersons. Adapt approaches and messages for various study milestones. Determine when to proactively seek news coverage.
- Outline a standard operating procedure for how your site will respond to media inquiries, interact with journalists, and share news reports with your team and other internal and external stakeholders.
- For successful interviews, make sure to prepare in advance. Deliver your key messages clearly and consistently. Provide background and facts to support your messages. Give examples and analogies that frame your story in a public health context. Follow up with the journalist after the interview.