

MEDIA ADVOCACY BASICS

A mini-guide for Hospice Advocates and professionals

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Getting Started in Media Advocacy

As you know, the news media are a key gateway to reaching the greater public and influencing policy makers. As such, effective advocacy should include a plan for engaging the press. At the local level, news outlets have a considerable and often untapped potential to impact public opinion and policy making. Additionally, local news outlets are more likely to take the time to listen, especially if the person speaking is a member of the community. Hence, hospice providers and Hospice Advocates like you have an advantage when contacting media representatives in your local area.

Though working with the media can seem intimidating at first, there's no need for you to worry. This guide is designed to help you through the process and give you the tools you need to effectively use the media to educate and influence policy makers and the general public on policy issues impacting the hospice community. The examples of impactful media advocacy efforts by hospice professionals and Hospice Advocates in this guide prove that the hospice community can embrace and excel media advocacy. So don't count yourself out, you too can successfully launch media advocacy efforts on behalf of hospice!

What is Media Advocacy?

Media advocacy is formally defined by the Encyclopedia of Public Health as “*the strategic use of mass media (newspapers, radio, television, blogs and other online news outlets) to influence policy initiatives.*” More simply put, it’s the process of sharing policy-related information through the communications media, with the aim to affect action, a change of public policy, or to alter the public’s view of an issue. That means that with the proper tools and a little savvy, you can manipulate the press to convey your message to the greater public and by extension, our nation’s key decision makers.

As you know, many national trade organizations and their advocacy affiliates like NHPCO and the Hospice Action Network use media advocacy to muster Congressional support and influence public opinion on policy issues. However, it can also be extremely effective on a grassroots level when utilized by professionals in the field like you to build support for upcoming legislative issues impacting hospice. There are many examples of successful media advocacy that you can look to for inspiration within the hospice community.

A recent example of effective multi-tiered media advocacy is NHPCO’s ongoing “Two Cuts are Too Much” campaign, which was first launched in late 2009 on a national level and has been subsequently picked up locally throughout the country by several member hospices. Certain information in this campaign (online articles and blog posts) is geared towards politicians and other opinion leaders whose support is needed to repeal cuts to funding, while slightly different but related information (letters to the editor) is aimed at current or potential Hospice Advocates. While the first is aimed at changing policy, the second seeks to rally supporters to advocate for hospice on the current policy issue and well into the future. Both, however, share the overall goal of protecting continued access to quality, end-of-life care nationwide. In the “Media Advocacy Tools” section of this guide, you’ll find sample resources used by a few NHPCO member hospices and Hospice Advocates in their local area media advocacy efforts.

Why does Media Advocacy Matter?

Members of Congress are elected by people –including you, your staff, patients and families — in their local areas to represent and protect the best interests of their states in the process of lawmaking. What does that mean for your media advocacy efforts?

It's simple, if the public is made aware of a story through the media, such as newspapers, daily blog posts or on the nightly television news, politicians must take heed. These outlets reach broad audiences and the public will assume that, if a story is in the news, it must be important. Policymakers and their staff make it a priority to stay abreast of the goings-on not only on Capitol Hill, but especially in their local communities. Legislators depend on this local and national media coverage to reflect the views of their constituents. In light of this, the media can help you generate support for an issue and provide a forum for you to present and discuss your position.

Well-educated members of the media and your community make enthusiastic Hospice Advocates. Therefore, by increasing the public's understanding of the unique pressures faced by hospice, your media advocacy efforts are likely to gain momentum and meet with great success.

How Do You Tell Your Story?

Establishing, Maintaining and Utilizing Relationships with Local Media

The key to developing lasting relationships with the media is ensuring that your interactions with reporters are mutually beneficial. That means that you are providing them with worthwhile news while drawing appropriate attention to the policy issues impacting hospice or hospice-related advocacy events you are promoting. Here are a few things that you can do to ensure you're covering both bases:

1. **Do your research.** More often than not, before a reporter calls on you as a source of information, he or she has already done some general background information on you and your level of expertise on the subject of his/her article. In the interest of valuing your time and theirs, it's of utmost importance that you extend the same courtesy to reporters. Take the time out to:
 - Read health and health policy stories in your local papers as often as they publish (include daily, weekly, and monthly news outlets). Learn which reporters consistently report on these issues and look up their contact information either on the publication masthead or online and make note of it so that you can make contact with them later.
 - Become familiar with local blogs that focus on hospice and end-of-life care issues. As you would with any news source, read the blog sites' "About the blogger" or "About me" sections to be sure that you'd be comfortable being associated with any content being posted from the author. Find three or four that you are comfortable with, preferably that focus on hospice in your local area, and email the bloggers about the issue you feel is newsworthy. Provide them some background information and tell them how it would impact your hospice staff, patients and families. You'll be surprised at how much interest you'll generate around an issue if a popular blog posts about it.
 - Watch local television news programs with your pen and paper handy so that you can write down where and to whom you can send your story ideas and press materials; local stations will normally provide an email address and/or phone number for area residents to alert them about newsworthy happenings.
 - Listen to local radio talk shows for upcoming health care and health policy-related programming. Write down station phone numbers so that you can call to pitch* your topic for these shows, or for opportunities to call in and engage in the debate when issues impacting your hospice surface as the topic of discussion.
2. **Have actual conversations.** In this age of quick and constant communication – through email, text messaging and social media – the art of good old fashioned talking seems to have been lost on many of us. However, some members of the media prefer a little human contact every now and then. So you are likely to stand out if you email or call and ask a local reporter/blogger to meet you for a cup of coffee to discuss area health policy news and issues impacting your hospice. During these chats, facilitate the spirit of reciprocity by asking if there are any stories they are working on that you can serve as a source for or offer background information on.
3. **Create and maintain a database.** As you become more familiar with and develop relationships with members of the local press, recording their information will be a crucial part of utilizing the media in

your advocacy outreach efforts. When gathering information about media contacts, you should store it in a spreadsheet, including the following fields:

- Medium (Newspaper, Newsletter, Blog, Television, Radio)
- Reporter/Media Contact Full Name
- Beat (Health, Lifestyle, Health Policy)
- Preferred method of contact (how contact would like to receive information, i.e. email, fax, etc.)
- Email
- Phone #
- Notes (here you'll want to record notes about any conversations you've had with the media representative, dates of contact, follow-up thoughts)

As your media advocacy efforts expand, your database will evolve and likely become one of your most valued assets.

4. **Be Responsive.** When members of the media reach out to you, respond promptly and with accurate information. When you are responsive to their needs, they will reciprocate the effort by following up on your press materials and be more receptive to writing about issues of concern to you. If you are unable to assist them by commenting or providing background information, find out whom in your organization can and tell them you'll get back to them. It's okay to tell a reporter that you are not familiar enough with an issue to comment or provide insight so don't feel compelled to speak about something that you are uncomfortable addressing. As long as you respond promptly and politely, they will appreciate your efforts to help even if you're unable to do so.

Making those four steps common practice in implementing your media advocacy plan will go a long way in helping you cultivate meaningful relationships with your local media.

Media Advocacy Tools

If you haven't done it before, introducing your organization, events or issues you feel are newsworthy to your local media can sometimes seem daunting or overwhelming. Here are a few key, accepted tools that you can use to effectively garner news coverage:

- **Media Advisory:** a brief announcement about an activity or event issued to the media several days in advance – for local media, 1-2 days notice is sufficient.
- **Press Release:** a timely, one-page announcement about breaking news, a newsworthy policy issue/statement, activity or event issued to the media immediately following the occurrence.
- **Letter to the Editor:** a letter written to a newspaper editor by a private citizen in response to content or an issue covered by the press outlet. Generally, no more than 250 words in length.
- **Op-Ed:** an opinion piece written by a newspaper or magazine's reader on issues relevant to the outlet's audience. Typically no longer than 750 words in length and published opposite to the editorial page.

Now that you know the tools you'll need to approach the media, in the following pages, you'll find tips on how to effectively craft each tool as well as examples of each.

Writing an Effective Media Advisory

Follow these tips when crafting your media advisories:

1. Start by typing "MEDIA ADVISORY" in bold, capital letters in the top left-hand corner of the page. Underneath that, put the date. Make sure you include month, day and year.
2. Place your contact information in the top right-hand corner of the page. This includes your name (or the name of the person who will be handling media inquiries), a phone number, and your email address.
3. Then, you'll need to craft and add your headline. To do this, skip a line and type your headline. Format it to be centered and bold. This headline should briefly describe your event, and grab the media's attention.
Example: Congressman Visits Local Hospice Program
4. Next, write the word "WHAT" in bold, capital letters. Tab over. Write what the event is. Limit the information to one or two lines. Write in the briefest way possible, giving the media only what is essential to know.
5. Next, space down. Write the word "WHO" in bold, capital letters. Tab over and write who will be involved or who is invited. Keep it brief and limit it to one line if possible. Follow suit for "WHEN" and "WHERE."
6. Add a space, and center "###" or "-30-" at the bottom of the page. This indicates to the press that the media advisory is over.

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
January 24, 2010

Media Contact:
Mary Pinto
Phone #(207) 555-3641
Email: mpinto@hsm.org

MEDIA ADVISORY

Local Hospice Hosts Congresswoman for Site Tour *Maine Representative Takes a Closer Look at Hospice*

- WHAT:** Hospice of Southern Maine (HSM) is proud to announce that Congresswoman Chellie Pingree and her local aide will be participating in a tour of the hospice's 18-bed facility, hosted by HSM Director of Finance Mary Pinto. The Congresswoman will also attend an afternoon reception with HSM staff and local end-of-life care advocates.
- WHO:** Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-1st-ME),
Mary Pinto, Director of Finance, HSM
Jackie Potter, Maine Aide to Congresswoman Pingree
HSM Clinical and Assistant Medical Directors
- WHEN:** Monday, February 1, 2010 at 1:00 p.m.
- WHERE:** Gosnell Memorial Hospice House
11 Hunnewell Road, Scarborough

###

Writing an Effective News/Press Release

Follow these steps when writing your news/press release:

1. **Start with the “Release Date.”** This tells the reporter when the information on the release can be published or broadcasted. The document can be released immediately to the public, in which case you can put “For Immediate Release: 00/00/00” at the top of the page with the current date. Reporters can also hold the information until a future date. In that case, you would need to put “Embargoed Until: 00/00/00” with the date the information is to be released. The release date is typically located on the top left-hand corner.
2. **Place your contact information in the top right-hand corner of the page.** This includes your name (or the name of the person handling media inquiries), a phone number, and your email address.
3. **Next, write your headline.** A headline is a short phrase summing up the essence of the release.

Example: Congressman Visits Local Hospice Program

4. **Then, include a “dateline.”** The dateline is the location of the story, which usually includes the city/town and state. *Example: ALBANY, NY – A bill signed into law today ensures access to quality and compassionate end-of-life care for the 1.4 million patients and families who seek hospice care each year.*
5. **The body of your press release will follow the dateline.** This is where you will tell the reporter/editor the “who, what, where, when and why” of your story. Your release should follow a ‘pyramid’ style of writing, where the most important information or newsworthy “hook” appears first, and is followed by supporting information. This writing style is necessary for any news materials, because your readers (reporter/editor) are busy and receive many different pieces of news. The reader may not have time to get through the entire page, so you must give the most important information – the reason why they should pursue a story – at the beginning.
6. **The first paragraph, the “lead,” should be the most powerful.** This is where you should tell the most important information of the release, in order to get the interest of the reporter/editor reading it.
7. **Keep your sentences and paragraphs short and use plain language.** Avoid acronyms and jargon. Also, you should try to keep your release to one page.
8. **Be sure to include a quote.** This puts a human face on the news you write. The quote should substantiate the lead, be from a significant person, and add value to the point of the release. Try to place the quote in the first three or four paragraphs of the release.
9. **Finish with a “tag.”** This is usually one paragraph of “boiler plate” information about your organization and its involvement with the issue covered in the release.
10. **End.** Reporters/editors look for a symbol (### or -30-) at the end of a release to let them know that the release is complete. If your release is more than one page, it is important to add “—more—” at the bottom of the first page to indicate that there is another page to the release. These symbols (### or -30-) and instructions (--more--) should be centered at the bottom of the page.
11. **Photos.** Photos from a meeting or an event can be helpful in getting coverage. Digital copies are the easiest to submit. Include a brief caption that has information about is the people in the photo, and the purpose of the event. (Note: Notify your contact that you will be emailing a photo before you send it. Emailed photos often weigh down a system, or may get caught up in a “spam” filter file.)

SAMPLE PRESS/NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

April 21, 2010

CONTACT: Dawn Teachey

Ph: (803) 555-4444

Email: dteachey@hsc.org

SOUTH CAROLINA HOSPICE CEO ADVOCATES ON CAPITOL HILL FOR PATIENTS & FAMILIES FACING END-OF-LIFE

Dawn Teachey asks Congress to Protect Access to Compassionate and High-Quality End-of-Life Care

Spartanburg, S.C. – Dawn Teachey, CEO of Hospice Care of South Carolina and over 400 other Hospice Advocates from across the nation this week urged Congress to protect access to compassionate and high-quality end-of-life care for all Americans. Teachey joined her fellow advocates in Washington, D.C. as part of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s (NHPCO) Capitol Hill Day 2010.

Teachey met with Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC) to discuss the value of hospice care to patients and their families in South Carolina. During the meeting, she encouraged Congress to support efforts to stop cuts to hospice programs nationwide especially smaller programs in more rural areas.

“Following health care reform and the cuts the hospice community are slated to sustain as a result of Medicare payment reform, Hill Day was a great opportunity to educate our Members of Congress about the value that we as hospice providers bring to [Insert state] patients and families facing the end-of-life.” Teachey said.

Over the past two years, the hospice community has been facing rate cuts on two fronts — regulatory cuts enacted in October 2009 that eliminated a key component of the Medicare hospice reimbursement known as the Budget Neutrality Adjustment Factor (BNAF) and more recently, cuts slated to be enacted in 2013 as a result of the health care reform bill passed last month. This year, they are working together to educate policy makers on how the hospice community will be impacted by the combined 14.3% reductions.

“In the aftermath of health care reform, NHPCO’s Capitol Hill Day 2010 was just the beginning of our efforts this year to educate Members of Congress on the hospice community’s value and uniqueness as compared with other health care provider groups. Over 1.4 million patients and their families depend on compassionate end-of-life care from hospice programs in communities throughout the country,” said J. Donald Schumacher, NHPCO president and CEO. “It is important that Congress know the importance of hospice to their constituents so they can take an active role in preserving compassionate end-of-life care for generations to come.”

For more information on Hospice Care of South Carolina, visit www.hospicecare.net, and to learn more about NHPCO’s Hospice Action Network and the hospice community’s advocacy efforts nationwide, visit www.hospiceactionnetwork.org.

Writing an Effective Letter to the Editor (LTE)

Here are a few things to keep in mind, before you start crafting your LTE:

A letter to the editor can be used to:

- Impact Policy/Legislation
- Generate Coverage of an Issue
- Set the Record Straight
- Deliver a Message
- Change Behavior

Tips for writing a letter to the editor:

- Before writing, be clear about what message you want to convey
- Refute or support specific statements; address relevant facts that are ignored.
- Support your facts but keep it concise.
- Make it pointed and punchy.
- Keep your letter to 250 words or less

Now that you're prepped on those key points, here are the steps you should follow to write your letter to the editor:

1. Start with the salutation "Dear Editor"

2. Choose ONE ISSUE for your letter.

Example: Two cuts are too much for the hospice community to absorb and continue to effectively provide compassionate and quality, end-of-life care.

3. Write a sentence or two identifying your organization and/or interest in the issue.

Example: As an employee of hospice I have learned and studies have shown that, when faced with a life-limiting illness, most people are more concerned about the impact it will have on their family, not themselves. Hospice care, like that provided by Hospice of Central Iowa, allows patients to live their last days completely and without pain while helping their families treasure final moments.

4. Write one or two sentences of background information.

Example: November is also National Hospice Month, a time to raise awareness of quality end-of-life care. With the hospice system currently facing two big cuts—a regulatory cut proposed last year and enacted last month as well as the projected health care reform reductions—this is more important than ever.

5. Write one or two sentences on your opinion. Write a sentence or two about your story if you feel comfortable.

Example: If passed, many Iowa hospices will be forced to close our operations or severely limit service areas. This is particularly so for those living in rural areas, where hospice care is often the most expensive to deliver.

6. In one or two sentences, offer a solution and encourage readers, policy makers, etc. to take a specific action (i.e., contacting an elected official, voting a certain way, etc.).

Example: I urge everyone in our state to contact Senator Charles Grassley and Senator Tom Harkin to tell them that "Two Cuts are Too Much for Hospice!"

7. Add your full name and contact information (phone, address, and email) to the end of your letter.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

November 18, 2009

RE: Health Care Reform and Hospice, National Hospice Month

Dear Editor:

November starts the season of reuniting and celebrating with loved ones. As an employee of hospice I have learned and studies have shown that, when faced with a life-limiting illness, most people are more concerned about the impact it will have on their family, not themselves. Hospice care, like that provided by Hospice of Central Iowa, allows patients to live their last days completely and without pain while helping their families treasure final moments. Thus, hospice plays a critical role in the lives of millions of people nationwide.

November is also National Hospice Month, a time to raise awareness of quality end-of-life care. With the hospice system currently facing two big cuts—a regulatory cut proposed last year and enacted last month as well as the projected health care reform reductions—this is more important than ever. If passed, many Iowa hospices will be forced to close our operations or severely limit service areas. This is particularly concerning for those living in rural areas, where hospice care is often the most expensive to deliver. Therefore, I urge everyone in our state to contact Senator Charles Grassley and Senator Tom Harkin to tell them that “Two Cuts are Too Much for Hospice!”

As a community, we need to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves and ensure that hospice is available now and for generations to come. Everyone can do this easily by following the link from www.hospiceofcentraliowa.org. Less than five minutes of time can make a difference.

Katie Smith McIntyre
Community Relations Coordinator
Hospice of Central Iowa
Phone: (515) 336-4258
Email: kmcintyre@hospiceofcentraliowa.org

Writing an Effective Op-Ed

Here are a few things to keep in mind, before you start crafting your op-ed:

An op-ed can be used to:

- Impact Policy/Legislation
- Generate Coverage of an Issue
- Set the Record Straight
- Deliver a Message

Tips for writing an op-ed:

- Before writing, be clear about what message you want to convey
- Keep your op-ed between 500-750 words (most newspapers and online publications have guidelines that fall within this range, but it might be worthwhile to contact your local media outlet to find out what their limit is before you start writing)

Follow these general steps when writing your Op-Ed:

1. **Choose ONE ISSUE for your Op-Ed.** Make sure you present the information in a way that qualifies you as an expert on this issue, highlighting relevant knowledge, background and supporting data.
2. **Identify a significant problem.** Search for a specific problem within your issue that clearly threatens the general public or at least some large segment of that public. You must focus. Clearly identify the problem, the audience it affects and how you might go about solving it.

Example: Before hospice, I had a series of frequent, short-term hospitalizations, followed by periods of being at home with no support services. Now, with in-home hospice care, I have intensive support from a nurse, social worker, physical therapist, chaplain, and volunteers, with family members providing ongoing care, and a hospice doctor providing overall supervision in consultation with my primary care doctor. Hospice staff is available on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If these programs are cut, patients like me will be forced to revert back to constant, costly short-term hospital care with no in-home support – we will suffer!

3. **Write a bold opening statement.** Open your op-ed by making a bold statement or asking a pointed question that forces the reader to read on. Make sure it is punchy and hard-hitting because the opening statement is you one chance to grab the reader. It will determine the focus of your article. It will dictate the evidence you offer to support your statement.

Example: Insurance companies and drug companies make billions of dollars in profits, but when Congress has gone looking to cut “waste, fraud, and abuse” in the health care sector why have they focused instead on programs that operate on tiny budgets such as hospice programs.

4. **Continue writing your first paragraph.** You should spend a lot of time on this. Weigh whether or not you would read-on if you saw the first paragraph of your piece in the paper. It never hurts to have a friend or trusted acquaintance read the paragraph to see how it flows.
5. **Defend your statement.** Use facts and statistics, but only those that apply directly to your statement. Don't go off on tangents. Space is limited so you will need to craft clear, concise arguments in support of your bold opening statement.
6. **Cite sources and be emotive.** To prove that your assertions can be proven include references to documents, studies, surveys, public statements, white papers, books, articles and the like to mirror

your point. Keep in mind that facts provide the reasons to agree with the statement, but emotion moves people to take action. No emotion, no action. That's just how the human mind works.

7. **Propose a solution** Wrap up your story by proposing at least one clear, bold and practical solution to the problem you have identified. Proposing a solution to the problem demonstrates that you aren't just complaining, but that you actually have crafted a solid advocacy argument. Sidestep proposing a solution and you will lose your audience.

SAMPLE OP-ED

DON'T CUT HOSPICE TO FINANCE HEALTH CARE REFORM

Insurance companies and drug companies make billions of dollars in profits. But when Congress has gone looking to cut “waste, fraud, and abuse” in the health care sector, why have they focused instead on programs that operate on a tiny budgets, such as hospice programs? Could it perhaps be because these programs lack the millions of dollars that lobbyists are spending daily to protect big corporate profits?

As a hospice patient diagnosed with end stage COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), I have a unique view as to the value of these services, both in saving money and improving quality of life. Unfortunately, because of the taboos around open and frank discussions about death and dying (exactly the kind of counseling that became demonized as "death panels" during the whipped up hysteria of last summer) many families don't get the opportunity for a realistic discussion of their options as a person nears death. Because of the slow and unpredictable course of my disease, I have now been in hospice care for nearly a year; most people enter hospice programs within only the last few weeks of life, and therefore are less able to advocate for these programs.

I have benefited enormously from being a hospice patient. Before hospice, I had a series of frequent, short-term hospitalizations, followed by periods of being at home with no support services. Now, with in-home hospice care, I have intensive support from a nurse, social worker, physical therapist, chaplain, and volunteers, with family members providing ongoing care, and a hospice doctor providing overall supervision in consultation with my primary care doctor. Hospice staff is available on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. My medicines and durable medical equipment are provided with no out of pocket costs, through the Medicare "hospice option." The hospice philosophy is focused on quality of life—as defined by the patient—which helps me achieve my self-defined goals. Hospice staff has provided support that has enabled my partner and I to go away for weekends, to attend social and cultural events in the community, and to fulfill as many of my wishes as possible during my final months of life. The guiding philosophy of hospice staff is “what can we do to help you achieve your goals?”

Hospice care is not only cheaper than my frequent hospitalizations, it is also better for dying people who have chosen to focus on quality of life rather than pursuing an elusive "cure." (Of course, patients who wish to continue receiving intensive medical and surgical interventions, rather than hospice care, should continue to receive the services they choose.) Why, then, when Congress is looking to find "extra" money to fund health care reform has it zeroed in on home care and hospice programs, which would appear to promote exactly the values embodied by reform? Helping people to access the care best suited to their needs, and which are cost-effective, are the kinds of programs we need more of, not less! Every dollar that is saved keeping people out of expensive hospitals and nursing homes when they can get the care they prefer should be used to enlarge these programs so they can meet demand. Indeed, surveys show that most people would prefer to die at home while in fact the majority of deaths take place in hospitals., Instead, small agencies are forced to struggle to serve the patients they now have, and may not be able to meet current need, let alone expand to reach all the people who can benefit from their services.

Judi Chamberlin is a hospice patient. She blogs about her experiences at <http://judi-lifasahospicepatient.blogspot.com>

Getting Your Media Advocacy Tools into the Right Hands

Media Advisories and Press/News Releases

Once your media advisory or press release is written, getting it into the right peoples' hands is of utmost importance. Here are a few things you should consider when determining how to disseminate your press release:

- Social media is becoming an increasingly comfortable and convenient way to engage within communities and expand professional and personal networks. Reporters for newspapers and publications – both big and small – have embraced social media tools as a way to disseminate and more importantly, receive news and story ideas. Twitter is currently among the most popular forms of release. So you'll want to tap into the power of this media source, to get your news published in local papers. If your hospice has an existing Twitter account:

1. You'll want to make sure you are following a few (at least two) health/health policy reporters at your local papers, or general reporters if you're in a smaller city or town. Make note of their Twitter handles.
2. Develop a "hook" or short description of the information you are submitting as news (no more than 100 characters in length).

Example: "Hospice Care of SC Pres meets with Sen. Jim DeMint about hospice and health policy on the Hill" (95 characters)

3. After you've developed your "hook," you will want to post your advisory or press release to a landing page on your hospice Web site and copy and paste the URL for that landing page.
4. Then, go to www.tiny.cc (or another Web site that will shrink your URL) and input the link into the input area and click the "tiny" button. Copy your new tiny URL; add it to the end of your "hook." *Example: "Hospice Care of SC Pres meets with Sen. Jim DeMint about hospice and health policy on the Hill <http://tiny.cc/x5yjl>"*

5. Next, you can EITHER

Tweet to the specific reporter you are interested in approaching about your story by adding his/her handle to the beginning of your tweet. *Example: "@NewsReporter: Hospice Care of SC Pres meets with Sen. Jim DeMint about hospice and health policy on the Hill <http://tiny.cc/x5yjl>"*

OR

Do a broad tweet to all of your followers. *Example: "Hospice Care of SC Pres meets with Sen. Jim DeMint about hospice and health policy on the Hill <http://tiny.cc/x5yjl>"* AND send a private direct message [click "Direct Messages" on the right hand side of your page, type the message in the box and click send] to the reporters including your tweet and your contact info.

6. Then monitor those publications to see if your tweets result in a story.

- Email and Fax are more traditional and still very effective means of disseminating your media tools if social media is not an option for you (depending on the reporter preferred contact method). If emailing a press release, it's most important to put the text of the release into the body of the email. Avoid sending emails with attachments to reporters as they are likely to be caught by spam filters and may not be delivered to the intended recipient.

Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

After you've spent hours crafting the perfect letter to the editor (LTE) or op-ed, getting it printed can be a little tricky. Here are a few things you should keep in mind when trying to get your pieces placed in local media:

- Only send one LTE or op-ed at a time. Editors prefer not to be inundated with opinion pieces from a single source.
- Do not send query letters or call editors to discuss op-ed ideas.
- In most cases, completed LTE or op-eds should be sent by fax or e-mail, especially if the piece is timely and could become dated quickly. Check the newspaper's submission policies.
- Op-ed editors are busy people. Many will call to let you know they plan to use a piece, but very few will contact you if they reject your submission. You should keep phone calls to editors to a minimum, and definitely not make them near the end of the day when the editor is working hard to meet his deadline.
- While inundating an editor is taboo, you can consider following up with the editor a week or so after submission to ask if the op-ed is under consideration. Think of your follow-up call as an opportunity to educate the editor about the issue -- even if your op-ed is not published. If your rapport is good, suggest a meeting or ask if there is a reporter who should get a copy as background on the issue. The result could be a relationship with the editor, which will prove helpful for the future.
- If your op-ed is published, make sure to clip it, make a copy including the name of the paper and date it was published, and send it to the policy makers you hope to influence, and NHPCO Hospice Action Network.
- Submitting the same LTEs or op-eds to multiple news outlets is strongly discouraged as most news outlets want to publish exclusive, original content. If you would like to submit opinion pieces to different outlets on the same topic, it is strongly encouraged that you craft differing letters highlighting the same key points.

Top 10 Tips for Effective Media Advocacy

1. Stay local.

One strong article in your hometown newspaper may be worth 10 in the New York Times.

2. Keep it focused.

You may have many issues to bring to the media, but stick to one at a time or they will get buried.

3. Clip and use your good press.

A good article can have a long life. Make sure to send press clippings to your members of Congress, other decision-makers (regulators, local representatives), and NHPCO Hospice Action Network.

4. Don't forget your own communications media.

Take advantage of your in-house newsletters, publications, local radio and cable programs to educate and get others involved in your advocacy efforts.

5. Just the facts.

Stick to what you know and never exaggerate. Remember, you can always get back to media contacts (reporters, producers, etc.) after finding the right answer.

6. Don't just say it, show it.

A demonstration or real-life testimonial goes a long way to illustrate your point and make it more colorful.

7. Build media relationships.

Get to know the reporters who cover hospice and health policy issues and take time to meet editorial boards. Relationships develop over time through mutual respect, so be responsive to media inquiries and do appropriate follow-up.

8. Put media relations into your advocacy agenda.

Media advocacy should be a year-round function objective of your hospice's overall advocacy campaign.

9. Appoint a press spokesperson for your hospice.

This contact person must be fully informed about your advocacy agenda to know what to say and what not to say.

10. Take advantage of all media outlets.

Congressional offices may read newspapers most often, but radio, television, and blogs have a powerful impact on public opinion. As you know, public opinion (the views of policymakers' local constituents) sways legislators.

Need more help with your media advocacy efforts?

Contact Angie Truesdale, Vice President for Public Policy, via phone at (703) 647-5163 or via email at atruesdale@nhpcohan.org.