NEWS MEDIA 101
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For Television
(including videos increasingly shot by newspapers)

Look good.
Use good posture, lean forward a bit. Doctors/lab researchers: keep a white coat or stethoscope around the neck handy...reporters find that looks “official” and helps convey authority to the audience.

Keep it short.

--Pretend you are explaining your work to a person you meet at a cocktail party: layman’s terms, don’t be afraid to communicate your excitement about your field. Have high energy.

Avoid jargon and acronyms.
--Better to say the John A. Burns School of Medicine than to say JABSOM. Avoid “translational research” and other terms. Plain English about what the term means is better for avoiding confusion; and they won’t use the JARGON-filled sound bite, even if everything else you said around the JARGON was brilliant.

Stay on your message.

--“Flag” or emphasize key points by saying, “The most important thing is....” or “I think the bottom line is....”

(This gets the attention of the reporter, and often allows you to sharpen the focus your comment.)

-Your comments will be heavily edited. That’s why technique of saying “the most important thing...” is helpful. Also, don’t be afraid of asking for the opportunity to explain something 2 or 3 times to be more concise. They will invite that option because it gives them more options in editing the video. Your actual sound bite on the air will probably be :08-12 seconds.

Avoid minutiae.
--It's okay to provide detail (1,601 cases of flu this year) IN DOCUMENTS YOU POINT TO OR PRINT OUT BEFORE OR AFTER THE ON CAMERA INTERVIEW, but you don't really need to convey exact numbers, dates, etc. WHILE ON CAMERA. Trying to remember exact data could cause you to err or stumble, or make you look at your notes, and not at the reporter.

**Connecting with reporters.**
--It's okay to correct the reporter if they have incorrect information. Merely be gentle. Say, "I know you want to get this right, I thought I heard you say ______.

**Relax....**
The reporter will likely NOT be relaxed. (They will be hurried, rushed, and otherwise may not be paying total attention to what you say.)

**...but don't relax too much.**
-Be pleasant, but try not to laugh or smile too much on camera. This is tempting to do, because sometimes reporters shoot the background video they will use after the interview is completed. Now everyone's relaxed. But if the video gets taken out of context, you could look frivolous or insensitive. (Editors may use the "background" video that was shot of you and the reporter, and in it, you might be smiling or laughing. Out of context, it could be used while the anchor person talks about a baby choking or something else serious leading into the actual soundbite you gave them.)

**Insuring accuracy (or trying to, anyway).**
-You are not likely to get to see the article BEFORE publication or broadcast. You CAN tell the person interviewing you to feel free to call you later, if they return to their computers to write, and discover they really don't understand an answer. Also, they might turn up additional information for you to help them with. Provide a number where they can reach you, stat!

**Bad News: Crisis Communication**

---Be first with the information. Be correct. First messages are often the ones remembered most.

---Express wishes and be regretful.
"We are concerned...and we intend to find out as soon as possible what...."

"Here is the action we are taking/have taken..." (Give a timeline).

---Admit what you can't answer.

Explain the process for finding the answers. ("We are assembling outside experts from the health field, military, etc...)

-Tell people what THEY can do. If the public can help by taking actions, give them something to do.

-Be clear, consistent, focused, reassuring, responsive. Have the appropriate tone for crisis/tragedy.

Offer to keep media updated as soon as you learn more. (Hourly updates? Daily updates? Depending on crisis.)

DON'T make promises you won't keep, however.

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