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**Organisation:** NHS Blood and Transplant

**Is this input submitted as an organisational or individual response?** Individual

**Are you happy for your response to be published by the Academy?** Yes

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### **Roles and responsibilities**

#### **1. What can scientists do to ensure their work is communicated accurately when working with you on press-released research?**

Make sure they give press officers an early heads up, preferably when a journal paper is accepted for publication. Some of the issues with accuracy come when there is very little time for the scientist, press officer and journal to PR the journal paper.

#### **2. What is the role of journalists in communicating the benefits or harms of medicines, and how much responsibility should they take? How does the pace of journalism affect this?**

Journalists are in a very influential position and we have seen in the past how things reported in the media can have inadvertent consequences, eg fears about contraceptive pill and DVT resulting in an increase in teenage pregnancies. Again journalists face the same problems with time, but always better when a specialist journalist picks up these stories.

#### **3. What is the role of press officers in communicating science to the public via the media, and how much responsibility should they take for accuracy of articles that originate from press-released research?**

Press officers have an important role to play particularly in helping the scientists translate their research for public consumption. Press officers should encourage the scientists to be open about any conflicts of interest, animal models etc

#### **4. What is the relative importance of accuracy and newsworthiness when working with scientists on press releases?**

Personally I think accuracy has to take priority. It shouldn't be publicity at all cost. I've sat on the other side of things in charities and seen the fear /worry that can come from over-hyped research. We need to remember, especially with medical research that there are often patients desperately waiting for improved treatments/cures

#### **5. Are you supported in your efforts to communicate the robustness of evidence – are appropriate guidelines available?**

Yes stempra guide is good

### **Evaluating and reporting evidence**

#### **6. What are the challenges of including sufficient clarity in press releases regarding:**

- whether something is an association or a causative relationship?
- whether a study is, for example, an observational study or a randomised control trial?
- whether the main result being reported was the finding related to the original hypothesis or an incidental finding?

**7. What in your opinion can be the effect of emphasising limitations and caveats in press releases?**

Clearer journalism/more accurate reporting

**8. Do you think journalists treat observational studies and randomised controlled trials differently, and do you approach press releases for each differently?**

Not well enough. I particularly have a loathing for how retrospective studies looking at food consumption and 'links' to diseases tend to be covered

**9. How important do you think absolute risk is when communicating risk, and do you always include it in press releases?**

**10. What do you think are the benefits and risks of publicising preliminary research (e.g. work in cells, before animal or human trials)?**

**11. What do you think are the benefits and risks of publicising unpublished science that's being presented at conferences?**

This is a tricky one, as often it's not publicised in a controlled way but gets out through people tweeting from a conference. I've spent all weekend handling something that came out of a presentation at conference and it's been terribly sensationalised in the media. It's very difficult to then grab hold of it particularly once it's taken root on social media

**12. What do you think are the benefits and risks of press releasing opinion pieces and editorials (rather than original research with new data) being published in journals?**

Again I've been hit by this in the past. These opinion pieces and editorials are often on medical ethics issues or really challenging subjects. Yes journals like to promote/pr them, but ideally other parties that work in the field should have an opportunity to rebut/be aware it's coming to ensure adequate support is in place for patients

**The process of communicating evidence**

**13. What do you think are the challenges of communicating evidence through the research → press release → media process? Do you think there might be a better system; and if so what would it look like?**

Reality is people are very busy. Events like café scientifique tend to attract people who are already interested.

Media tends to reach big audiences but risk of sensationalism.

Could encourage scientists to blog more

**14. How much do the public understand about the way science works (the process of research and publication; different types of studies; etc.), and does it matter if they don't? Do you think press officers and journalists have any role in educating the public in interpreting the quality of evidence?**

Think there is very limited understanding of this.

**15. What are the challenges of working with scientists with opposing views, and how do you navigate working with scientists that may have views that might be seen as different from those of the mainstream scientific community?**