



Media Interviews

Getting Your
Message Across

Your Local Communications Team Contact:

Name:

Telephone:

Email:

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1. Media Interviews – getting your message across

This guide was developed as a support for staff who are called on to do an interview on the radio, on television, for online/social media or for print media.

It is also used to support the HSE Media Training Programme. This is a half-day accredited course for between 1 and 4 people, delivered by communications professionals working in the Communications Division.

It covers the following topics

- Why we need to take the opportunity to share our story
- Tone of voice
- Understanding the media/journalists:
- What makes a news story?
- Being driven by deadline
- The Rule of 3 – preparing your message
- Plant, Breathe, Go – getting prepared physically
- Presentation
- Content and delivery
- Illustrating your story
- Practical exercises:
 1. Radio interview and playback
 2. TV interview and playback

Media Support

The HSE Press Office team provides frontline media relations for the health service and responds to approximately 5,000 media queries received by the national office each year. Hospital Group and Community Service communications teams also deal with thousands of media queries. There is a media protocol for the HSE and all media queries must be referred to the Communications Division (either to the national team or to a local team). There is a list of contacts for the Communications Division on the website **www.hse.ie/communications**. The HSE out of hours press number for urgent queries is **087 227 4605**.

Why Are We Doing This Training?

The HSE is the largest organisation in the country and provides health and social services to more than 5 million people. Over 140,000 staff work together to provide many millions of appointments and services every year. It is important that we take every opportunity we can to promote the work, services, new developments and provide reassurance when needed.

There are times when we need a public platform for that communication. Sometimes it's because there is a positive development which we hope will be of interest to the public; sometimes we are asking the public to take a particular action. At other times, we need to share vital information, apologise when something has gone wrong and

reassure people using our services.

We use multiple channels to provide a vast amount of information that can at times be difficult to understand. It is our job to make this complex information easier for people to understand. This is so important when it comes to people's health and helping people to make informed decisions based on clear, trusted and easy to follow guidance. The media enables us to connect with large groups of the population.

Our HSE Press Office staff are proactive in pitching stories, news and interviewees to promote services, initiatives and entitlements. Our staff are key to explaining the benefit to the public and outline any call to action that is needed. It is important that we take every opportunity possible to share our work, initiatives and information. The majority of the interviews that HSE staff do are proactive and aimed at sharing health information with the public. It is important to remember that you are the expert and you have a wealth of information to share, the HSE Communications Division is here to help you to do that.

There is no one better placed than ourselves to explain the importance of what we are doing, and the difference we are making to people's lives every day. In fact, no one else is going to do that job for us, which is why it is important that you feel empowered to say "Yes" to opportunities to communicate with the people we serve.

It is important that we all work to make sure that the HSE message gets to the people using our services. With the modern-day news cycle moving 24/7, the story will be told with or without us, so we need to ensure that the HSE voice is included.

If you use the tips in this guide, you will be prepared for many types of interview. Your local communications team is also available

to help you prepare, especially if you are involved in a large or high profile project.

Tone Of Voice

We want to be the trusted source of information in Ireland, communicating in a consistent style and tone helps to build and maintain that trust. We want to reflect the HSE values – care, compassion, trust and learning and put our patients and service users at the centre of everything we do. We must communicate in a way that:

- expresses our values
- builds trust in what we say and how we say it
- is consistent across everything we say and do

We want to make sure that when we provide information it is clear, consistent and easy to understand. We communicate with many different groups of people, including our patients, service users, stakeholders and partners, staff, journalists and public representatives.

Our tone of voice must be factual, informative, and transparent. We should seek to explain fully what's going on as far as possible.

When communicating about difficult subjects, your tone should communicate genuine understanding and respect. The listener should feel empowered and informed. You should always use words that are simple and easy to understand. Avoid jargon, acronyms and unnecessary technical language.

Sometimes we will be speaking about complicated topics, ranging from important health advice and new services to something that has gone wrong, why it has happened

and what we are doing about it. Regardless of the topic, it is important we focus on what we want our audience to understand. We want our patients, service users and clients to understand and follow important health advice and know they are getting their information from a trusted expert.

When things go wrong, which they can from time to time, we should not defend the indefensible, we need to own the shortcomings, say we are sorry and highlight how we are approaching solutions. As we work to provide hugely varied and complex services to 5 million people, nobody expects us to get everything right all the time. But they do expect us to show that we are trying to get it right, and that we are open and honest about shortcomings when things go wrong. If you are talking about an issue where something has gone wrong or where there is an issue accessing a service – don't be afraid to acknowledge this and the impact on people. If something has gone wrong then it is important to acknowledge and apologise. Telling people "We are sorry, that isn't the level of service we would hope to provide" reinforces the message that we also are not satisfied with the level of service provided.

The best interviewees and public speakers are the ones who speak with passion about their subject, and we ourselves are best placed to display that passion for our health services. This guide, alongside training opportunities, will enable you to speak with passion for your service, and to build trust in our services.

It is normal to be nervous: being on radio or TV is a different environment and it makes us feel uncomfortable. You need to be aware of your tone and voice. We always have the same voice, but we sometimes change our tone. People do this all the time. You might use one tone in a meeting with your boss,

and a different tone when you are home having dinner with your family. It is important to be respectful and empathetic, warm and engaging.

Telling Our Story

Part of our job is to tell our story in a way that is easily understood by members of the public. Health is complex so it is not always easy to tell our story simply, but it is worthwhile. So many of our staff are working to deliver better services with easier access and higher quality of care for patients, and it is important for you as a spokesperson to ensure the public understand the work they are doing.

Radio is a powerful medium to use to do this. It is one of the best places to get the attention of the audience and get your message across. By doing a radio interview, you will have the opportunity to deliver your message directly to the ears of hundreds of thousands of people on national stations or tens of thousands of people on local radio stations. Recent Joint National Listenership Research figures (JNLR) revealed that 82% of Irish adults listen to the radio every day and on average Irish people have a radio on for more than four hours a day.

Don't underestimate the power of national and local radio when it comes to getting our messages across. Just look at the figures. RTÉ's Morning Ireland is one of the most-listened to shows, reaching over 400,000 people daily. News at One has over 300,000 listeners while Newstalk has over 400,000 people tuning in daily.

Local radio remains a powerful medium, particularly outside Dublin and the greater Dublin commuter belt. In terms of the numbers of people listening, Radio Kerry has a weekly reach of 83,000 listeners in

the county while Highland Radio in Donegal reaches 89,000 listeners every week. The listening figures are high; by doing an interview on local radio, you have the potential to reach many people. What you say will not only be heard by those listening. If it is interesting, it will be talked about afterwards with many who were not listening.

You have to consider your audience when being interviewed. Try to consider their emotional state, and to vary your tone accordingly. We sound different when we're speaking about a health issue that people are affected by compared to an interview highlighting something like the health service garden in Bloom.



Remember you are the expert. Something that is easy for you to understand might not be for the listener. It is sometimes useful to imagine you are talking to a specific acquaintance who is unfamiliar with the health service. Talk on radio as if you are explaining to them, and this will help you to simplify.



2. Preparing for a media interview

In This Section:

- Prepare, prepare and then prepare some more
- Requests for interviews or statements
- Your message grid / Q&A
- What to do once you have prepared your message grid / Q&A
- Bridging technique to help you get your messages across
- General tips when practising
- Summary

Prepare, Prepare and then Prepare Some More

It is natural to be nervous ahead of a media appearance and the best way to combat nerves is to prepare as much as you can in the time available. Even the most natural and relaxed of interviewees and public speakers spend a lot of time preparing.

When we as HSE staff take part in media interviews, we are representing the health service. Our role is to impart accurate information in a clear way that is easy for the public to understand.

However, once the interview is over you want to feel that you have met your own goals. The best way to achieve that is to:

- Spend some time beforehand deciding on your main messages.
- Work out how to communicate those messages to your audience.
- Practise aloud.
- Anticipate the difficult questions you would not like to be asked and prepare answers for them.

Keep in mind the reason you said “Yes” to

this opportunity. If you keep a clear aim and purpose in mind, you will be more likely to achieve that aim.

This section of the guide will give you some tools and tips to make sure you feel well prepared and confident.

Requests for Interviews or Statements

All requests from the media, whether for a statement or a spokesperson, should come through your local communications team, or the HSE Press Office. Please ensure a spokesperson is available for possible interviews following a proactive press release, particularly if a spokesperson has been quoted in the press release.

Scoping Out The Interview Request

Talk to the communications team and together decide if this is an opportunity you should take. Decide what communications approach to take to the project or issue.

The HSE Communications team can also make sure that you have relevant background information such as:

- Who else will be interviewed, if anyone?
- An idea of the angle or approach the journalist wants to take.
- The audience - who is listening, watching or reading?

The communications team will work with you and the interviewer to make sure that both you and the interviewer have a common understanding of what the interview is about, and what questions you are in a position to answer.

Your Message Grid

On the next page, you will see a grid that is useful when preparing for interviews. Here is how to use it:

- Decide on the three main things you hope to get across in an interview.
- These are your key messages and it can be useful to decide how you'd like people to act after hearing you; or how you'd like them to feel; or what you'd like them to do.

- Refine each of your three key messages down to a simple, memorable phrase or sentence. This clarifies your own thinking and means that you can get your message across even if you only have a short amount of time available.
- Start filling in possible questions in the left-hand column. Think of questions relating to who, what, where, when, why, then you will have many of the obvious questions covered. Think of all questions, not just those you would like to answer. Get as much advice as you can on the questions that might come up.
- Think of answers for each of the questions – and where possible, link these answers back to your three key messages.
- Make sure to include stories and examples so that you can paint memorable mental pictures for your audience.
- Your communications team can help you prepare for the interview. It is important that you are comfortable with all of the possible responses you have prepared.



Message Grid

My Three Key Messages:

Message One:

Message Two:

Message Three:

Possible Questions and Answers (Q&A):

*** Possible question (remember to include challenging questions)**

*** Our response (remember to bridge back to your key messages where possible)**

[illegible]

What To Do Once You've Prepared Your Q&A

- Practice your answers aloud as much as you can. You do not need to know them off by heart (and in fact this would be a bad idea) BUT it is helpful if you have heard your own voice talking through the messages and responses in advance of the actual interview.
- You can do this on your own easily by recording yourself on your phone. Hearing your own voice back can be useful when practising. Alternatively, practise with a colleague, or when possible with a representative from your local communications team.
- When listening back be aware of any verbal tics or ummms. Also, be aware of your tone, and make sure that your message is easy to understand.

Bridging Technique To Get Your Message Across

Your aim in taking part in the interview is to get your key messages across to your audience in an easy to understand way. However, the journalist's aim is to create engaging radio for their listeners or an interesting story for their readers. In order for those two aims to be achieved, you need to give the journalist factual, interesting answers, while also bringing the interview back to your three key messages, (Remember your stories and pictures).

Your aim is to get your three messages across and as an interview can be short, it is important to make the most of the time available. You can 'bridge' back to your key messages if the interview moves off topic. Here are some phrases to help you to do this:

"I hear what you're saying, but our focus is...."

"There is a bigger issue here, and that's....."

"What I'd really like your listeners to know about is...."

Use a form of words that feel natural to you. For other useful phrases, go to page 24.

- It is important that you acknowledge questions from the journalist. Your aim is to make sure that you use the interview to get your messages across.
- Your local communications team can show you examples of the bridging technique being used well – and also times when it's being used inappropriately.

General Tips When Practising

- Avoid jargon at all costs. Think about someone at home, a family member or friend, who doesn't work for the HSE – would they understand everything you are saying? Your colleagues might understand that when you say BP you mean blood pressure, but many members of the public will not.
- Take a few moments to decide how you will link from the first question you are asked into your most important point. You are not trying to avoid any question, but you do want to make sure that your messages are heard. Your first question is usually always a version of 'What's this about?' or 'Tell me what's happening'
- It may be as simple as a brief direct answer, then continuing with a phrase like "but the important thing is..."
- Can you use words, phrases and ideas in groups of three? We remember something more easily if something is said in a group of three, as it is a brief yet identifiable pattern.
- Use examples and stories to talk directly to your audience. The famed GAA commentator Micheál O'Hehir said that his commentaries were focussed on a friend in Clare who had lost his sight. He had to 'paint pictures' for him and you have to do the same for your listeners.
- Be prepared to get your information (for example a main point, or website address) across as early as you can in an interview, because you never know when the conversation will finish, or move to another topic. For example, if you have a helpline number or webpage you want to direct the audience to, make sure to give this information upfront.
- Know the journalist you are talking to and know the audience for the show and tailor your answers accordingly. Speak to your Communications team in advance of the interview so they can advise on any recent similar interviews from the same show/journalist they have picked up through media monitoring.
- Facts and figures will work only if they are meaningful. It is easier for audiences to understand "weather forecasts are right about six days a week" than "they are over 85% correct". Choose carefully how you will use a statistic - "within a ten- mile radius" and "over three hundred square miles" sound very different, but means the same thing.
- Leave out all unnecessary detail and stick to your key messages. The clearest interviewees are those who signpost, steer and summarise. In particular, try to be clear about where listeners and readers can go to get more information or reassurance.
- Show that you care - if you don't, why should the listener or reader?
- If you are talking about an issue where something has gone wrong or where there is an issue accessing a service – don't be afraid to acknowledge this and the impact on people. Saying "I want to say I am sorry. That isn't the level of service we would hope to provide" where something has gone wrong can be very powerful.
- Most important of all if you don't know the answer to a question, just say so. The fastest way to talk yourself into trouble is to try to talk about something you don't know. You can always offer to get back to them with the relevant information at a later stage.

3 Doing the interview

In This Section

- Practical things to do before the interview
- Types of interview
- General tips for during an interview
- Doing an interview with a patient/ service user

Practical Things To Do Before The Interview

- If you are being interviewed in a radio or TV studio, arrive in good time. If it is possible, always try to go to the studio for the interview. Note that some radio stations broadcast (live-stream) video of their radio shows or may take photos for social media. Look at 'Dress to Impress' on page 18.
- If you are being interviewed by phone, find a quiet area to prepare and to take the call. Where possible use a landline rather than a mobile phone for sound quality. Have some water available – adrenaline can dehydrate you and give you a dry mouth.
- In radio or TV studios, do not get caught up in any atmosphere and banter; you should be focusing on your message. Equally, do not be surprised if production staff and even the interviewer seem distracted, as you may not be their only focus (even during the interview).
- If you are in a studio, you might have a few minutes beforehand with the presenter or producer. You can check the areas of discussion, suggest any ideas that you feel should be included, ask how you will be introduced, and what the first question will be. If it is wildly off the mark, suggest a more appropriate but equally challenging alternative.
- Before you start talking, remember Plant, Breathe, Go. This means planting yourself in a comfortable stance; taking a deep breath and remembering to start talking at the top of the breath.
- Taking that deep breath provides oxygen to the brain, and helps to keep you calm so that you can deliver your message evenly. Nerves may lead you to speak too quickly, but a deep breath can counteract that.
- It is natural to feel tense and nervous. Think about where that tension can go before and during the interview, and make sure it is not visible. You can use tricks like placing both feet flat on the floor and scrunching your toes – this can help to 'flow' the nervous tension from your body to the floor.
- Avoid swinging in your chair as the microphone can pick this up.
- Try to include information on HSE assets into any print or online interviews. Provide a link to any video, leaflet, webpage, TV ad, radio ad, photo etc. This can help when promoting a campaign or to give further information about the topic. Most media outlets will use these resources on their website to illustrate the story for their playback.

Types of Interview

- Radio
- Soundbite
- Print
- Social Media
- Podcasts
- Internal HSE Channels including broadcast emails, 'Health Matters', #OurHealthService
- Television

Radio

A radio interview can take place over the phone, in-studio or on location. It could be live or pre-recorded (to be aired at a later date). Radio has varied listenership and audiences including community radio (for example, Dublin South FM), regional radio (for example Ocean FM) or national radio (for example Newstalk).

If there is an opportunity to do the interview from the studio, take it. Being face to face with the interviewer creates a better connection for the listener.

Key Pointers

- Bring a postcard listing your three key points. Perhaps an impressive statistic or a neat turn of phrase. Avoid bringing lots of pages of notes, as you will not have the opportunity to refer to them and they will be a distraction. Local radio stations are increasingly asking for video/photography of studio guests. Beware of what you may have written in your notes being picked up by a good camera.
- It is very easy for a listener to switch off. Paint a picture by giving examples and illustrations for your audience.
- Be yourself. Slow your speech if you are a quick speaker. You can pause or use short silences effectively. Use simple, conversational language, and avoid jargon at all stages.
- Remember Plant, Breathe, Go. Make sure you start talking at the top of a deep breath, so that you don't run out of air before you have finished a point.
- Don't fiddle with your pen, swing in your chair or tap the table. The microphone will pick up everything. Don't swivel in your chair. It is distracting. Remember that many programmes are live-streamed.
- Remember you are talking to thousands of listeners, and they (not the interviewer) are your real audience. The presenter may challenge you, change their tone of voice, and even raise their voice. Keep your tone even and relaxed. If you respond to aggressive questioning with an aggressive answer, the audience will focus on the interaction, and your message will be lost.
- Your tone of voice is very important, and should reflect what you are saying. If appropriate, remember to be enthusiastic.
- Listen to the question and wait until the question has been fully asked before answering. On radio, it is acceptable to have up to a 6 second pause without sound. It is fine to take time to respond, no need to rush in.
- Stay hydrated. Avoid salty foods, coffee in advance of interview
- Beware of mics 'always-on' on at the start and end periods of live interviews.

Soundbite

A soundbite is a much shorter type of interview that captures your main message(s), or a summary of your main message. You will often hear soundbites used during a radio news bulletin or headlines. Soundbites can be more effective than a full interview because:

- Brevity makes a greater impact
- It is easier to sustain your energy while delivering the message
- The strongest soundbites stand-alone

Remember that a soundbite needs to stand on its own and make sense for the listener even if they do not hear the question you were asked. The context needs to be within your sound bite.

How To Prepare For A Soundbite

- Practice making a clear statement in 10, 15 or 20 seconds. Fifteen seconds is long enough to paint a picture or give an example to carry the main message.
- Do not try to cram too much in – prioritise your messages (use the Message Grid on page 8).
- The advice to Plant, Breathe, Go is still important.

Key Pointers

- Don't start with "Yes, well." or "em. "
- If the reporter tells you how long the soundbite should be, keep within the time so that your quote is not edited afterwards without your input.
- Repeat the question as part of the answer if it helps give your answer context.

Podcast

A podcast is a digital audio program consisting of a series of audio episodes that you can download or stream from the internet. It works very much like a radio show, but with one major difference – you can set the agenda for your audience who can listen to it anytime they want.

You may be asked to take part in a HSE podcast. As part of your preparation in advance of your recording, you will meet with the podcast host/team to discuss the recording process, when and where the podcast will be recorded, and the types of questions that your host will be asking you and the key message/s that need to be delivered. You will clarify what you would like to get across to your target audience, your experience/s, your stories and the topics you feel comfortable discussing.

A 30-minute podcast usually takes approximately 1 hour to record as edits will be needed, and it will then be reviewed for approval before release. When the host asks you a question, you should always aim to guide your answers back towards the host's original question and keep your response focused and on track. Try to be mindful of how long your answers are, if you have been speaking uninterrupted for 10 minutes, your host may need to move onto their next question! Do your best to keep things simple and concise.

Key Pointers

Try to think of any relevant stories or anecdotes you could use to illustrate your points, people tend to remember information much better when it is presented as stories and illustrations. Having a few examples to illustrate your points can be a big help.

Referencing your service, a couple of times throughout the interview is generally good



practice; it's a simple prompt or reminder for listeners who may be interested in learning more. Signpost the listener to find out more e.g. www.hse.ie or your relevant service throughout the podcast so the listener can get any support available.

Print

An interview for print can take place face-to-face, or over the phone/web. A journalist may take notes and/or record the interview. Note that some articles could be used for online editions as well as print (for example Independent.ie).

These types of interviews are very different to radio. The tone of your voice is not captured, so be aware that your words could be taken out of context. A light-hearted response could appear cold and flippant when quoted in a newspaper or for an online article.

Remember as well that you are always “on the record”.

Key Pointers

- Avoid HSE jargon and acronyms and TLAs – three letter abbreviations. If you must use an abbreviation, explain it in simple terms that are easy to understand.

- The journalist may provide questions in advance to help you prepare – check with your local communications team about this.
- If you do not know the answer to something, be honest and say so. If possible, offer to get the information and come back to the journalist.
- Remember to stick to your key messages as much as possible, as you will have no control over which quotes from you the journalist uses. If you can stick closely to your key messages, there is a better chance they will reach your audience and you will have achieved your aim.

Social Media (Video Interviews)

Video for social media is widely used across the health service. It is a quick and relatively easy way of communicating important news or campaign messages. You should also be prepared for a social media interview following a face to face media interview. It is quite normal for an interviewer to capture a short video with you after you media interview. Transitioning from a TV or radio interview to a social media interview on the same topic provides an opportunity to



reinforce your message and engage with a different audience. You can use the social media interview to offer a brief summary of the key points, or delve deeper into a topic or discussion.

Preparing for a HSE social media video is slightly different in that you use your key messages, but they will each be recorded separately. A member of the social or local communications team will record them. Ideally, the video should be 10-15 seconds long and would have one key message per video. Short videos can be shared on the HSE social media channels over the course of the day / week / campaign.

- Look at the camera throughout the recording.
- Be real about risk and the issues. It is important to balance benefits and limitations and be clear about how things can possibly go wrong.
- Note: you only have the audience for a few seconds so make sure your message is one you would like them to remember.

Preparing For A Video

- Request a full brief from your local communications team to ensure you are well prepared.
- Ask for the questions in advance to help craft the three key messages to get across.
- Your body language for a video clip is important. Communication is 7% verbal, 38% what we hear and 55% visual.
- The person interviewing you for a video clip will tell you if you should look directly at the camera, or at the interviewer.
- Prevent and manage interruptions in remote interviews. Ensure interview is taking place in location where you will not be disturbed (e.g. children walking into room etc)
- Remember – Plant, Breathe, Go.

Dealing with negativity on social media after an interview is a challenge, but not too common. Unfortunately, negativity on social media is a part of the online landscape, and not everyone will agree with your message.

Determine whether the criticism is constructive. Ignore trolls and hateful comments, sometimes, negativity on social media is nothing more than trolling. It's often best to ignore such comments rather than engage with them, as engaging can sometimes amplify the negativity.

If someone persists in posting offensive or abusive comments, talk to your communications team about reporting them to the platform for harassment or abuse.

Internal HSE Channels

You may be invited to do an interview for a 'Health Matters' article or another HSE publication or internal video.

Although it will be a less pressurised environment than an external media interview, the same rules apply when preparing your messages and conducting yourself during the interview.

Examples of internal videos including the 'CEO Monthly Message' can be seen on the HSE YouTube channel at:

www.youtube.com/user/HSEIreland

Television

A television interview can take place in a studio or on location, recorded live or pre-recorded. Television interviews requests are usually for national stations (for example RTÉ, TG4 or Virgin Media).

Key Pointers

- Arrive in good time.
- Plant yourself in the chair, back erect and lean forward to appear enthusiastic, using your hands when making points. Do not lean away from the interviewer, even in an attempt to look relaxed. It may appear nervous, defensive or too casual.
- Television cameras tend to flatten rather than magnify your performance. Heighten your energy level to compensate by expressing passion about the subject. You can use your hands as you talk, just be careful to avoid the microphones, and don't make expansive gestures that may encroach into someone else's 'shot'.
- Good eye contact with the interviewer is essential. If you find eye-to-eye contact intimidating, look at the presenter's top lip. Only look away if there is a positive reason for doing so - to look at another guest or a piece of film, for example.
- If recording in a remote studio, always look directly into the camera. Be aware that you may see yourself in the camera, and this can be disconcerting.
- On location be conscious of your background and environment. For example if you are talking about healthy eating make sure you are not being filmed near a fast food outlet or advertising.
- Remember TV will frame your face. Be calm, use high hand gestures, if possible. Keep your eyes on the interviewer— not on the camera (unless you are doing a remote interview).
- If the topic is very serious, it is acceptable to give a light smile to acknowledge the "thank you" at the end.



- At the end of your piece, stay still and attentive for five seconds or so, as if listening to another question (this helps with editing). Do not move away or speak until you are given a signal to do so.

Dress To Impress

How you look is critical when communicating on television - your face, clothes, hair, body language and demeanour. Communication is 55% visual. Make sure your appearance is appropriate.

Key Pointers

- Avoid patterned clothes, such as dots, small checks, stripes. Blues work well, as will most mid-tones and pastel shades. Avoid pillar-box red or stark white.
- Television cameras and bright lights can alter your appearance drastically, which is why make-up is essential. Accept make-up if offered for TV interviews, even if you do not wear it usually.
- Avoid shiny, dangly jewellery, especially bracelets, large neckpieces and earrings.
- Suit jackets are usually best buttoned standing, unbuttoned sitting. Pull down the tail of your jacket as you sit to avoid gathering at the shoulders. Ties should be well knotted (if wearing one).
- Glasses and heavy fringes can be a problem as they can shadow the eyes. Glasses also reflect the lights so if you can manage without them, do. If not, thin frames are better than thick and plain glass is preferable to tinted. Photosensitive lenses should be avoided.
- If you are being interviewed on location, think about the image the camera will show and check what else is in the shot. Move to another location if you are not happy with the background. A pull up banner or branding may be useful if you are at an indoor location.



General Do's And Don'ts For All Types Of Interview

What to **do** during any type of interview

Regardless of what area you work, in this interview you are representing the HSE.

- Be polite and friendly. Even if the presenter or interviewer is a household name, try not to be too nervous; remember you are the expert on the topic.
- Agree beforehand with the journalist how you will be described or introduced, and remember that long HSE titles can be confusing for the public. Agree a sensible description of your role.
- If the presenter or journalist shares wrong information you should politely correct it. Otherwise, it will seem that you agree.
- If you cannot comment on a particular question, explain why. For example, *"It is currently before the courts"* or *"I should not pre-empt the report"* or *"the HSE cannot comment on individual cases when to do so might reveal information in relation to identifiable individuals. This would breach our duty of confidentiality."*

Additional lines depending on the nature of the query:

"The patient's clinical team can discuss options with the family directly."

OR

"A member of a client's clinical team however would be happy to discuss any aspect of a service user's care with them or their family members –we are liaising with families directly regarding this matter."

OR

"When a client or family makes personal information public, this does not relieve the HSE of its duty to preserve/uphold client confidentiality at all times."

- If the journalist brings up a topic that they had previously agreed was not appropriate in your role as spokesperson, you can politely mention this, but follow on straight away with an alternative topic.
- Photos, live-stream or video might be taken at any interview for social media, so dress well for all types of interview. Make sure your dress, hair, body language and location are appropriate.
- Take every opportunity to smile, if appropriate. Used properly, it can even defuse a hostile question.
- Look at the interviewer. You will be able to read interest, boredom or puzzlement on their face. It will also make the conversation more normal.
- If the interview is ending and you feel that you have not gotten your messages across, ask for the opportunity to add one last point.

What to **avoid** during any type of interview

- Don't feel constrained by the question. Each question is a starting point or springboard. You can and should move on to your agenda (the three key messages).
- Don't haggle over irrelevant details. Steer the conversation firmly your way. Do not highlight the fact that you are changing the subject or avoiding a question. Say "*the real issue is this...*" rather than "*the question you should ask is...*". Remember the bridging technique on page 10.
- Don't over-react. If a presenter appears confrontational, it is usually to get a vigorous response from you. A challenging question that gets a confident reply can only strengthen your case. If you react too vigorously, you will lose your audience. If you feel the presenter is being rude, you should remain polite.
- Don't allow words to be put into your mouth. If the presenter tries to summarise what you are saying, it is usually a clue that you are not being clear or concise enough. Do not accept the presenter's version unless you are happy with it.
- Don't feel that you have to keep talking to fill a void; make your point, then stop talking.
- Don't try to put on a 'radio voice' - be yourself. Do not feel inhibited about your accent. It adds interest and colour to the interview and it is a part of your personality.
- Don't treat the microphone as a public address system.
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations or initials without explanation.

Doing A Media Interview With A Patient/Service User

When people share their personal experiences of the health service, it can be both compelling and emotive. This is why your local communications team or the broadcaster may encourage you to take part in an interview that includes a person using our services.

Key Pointers

- If you are being interviewed and someone has just shared their personal story, acknowledge this and that it may have been emotional or upsetting for them to recall what happened.
- If the story reflects negatively on the health service, apologise and address concerns. Saying sorry matters to people. People who have been affected want to ensure that it does not happen to others. It is important to explain what has changed so the same

thing should not happen again to another person.

- You can say that due to patient confidentiality, you are not able to comment in detail on the individual circumstances of their case but you do want to talk about the wider health system.
- Empathy and respect for what people have been through are key in terms of tone. Offer clear information and explain what you do know.
- Signpost to where people can get information. When we explain things clearly and with care and compassion, people have more confidence and trust in us and are more likely to listen and take advice.
- Be real about risk and potential issues.

It is important to balance benefits and limitations and be clear about what could go wrong. Include simple explanations on open disclosure.

4 Communicating in a crisis

There are many types of crisis from a major emergency (train accident, flooding/ weather events) to a crisis in the service due to a negative experience.

The news-cycle is now 24/7. In a crisis, this means getting your message across 24/7.

Managing communications in a crisis will always be a team effort, and your local or national communications team will be part of that response. The communications team will advise on the appropriate communications response. The following information is for reference.

In This Section

- Why do interviews during a crisis?
- Assigning spokespeople
- Staying on top of the story
- Questions about an individual case
- The 'doorstep' interview

Why Do Interviews During A Crisis?

A crisis can undermine public confidence in the health service and threaten the reputation and credibility of the organisation, or it may require a call to action to the public

When the media report on a crisis, the outcome may depend on what is done and said in the first few hours. The tone of reporting for the entire crisis can be based on the media's view of how the organisation is coping. If handled correctly, the damage can be minimised.

Remember communicating in a crisis is always managed as a team.

The most important step is to recognise that you have a crisis. If you believe there is an imminent crisis, notify your local communications team (**www.hse.ie/communications**) as soon as possible so they can advise on the best approach and arrange media training for identified spokespeople.

Assigning Spokespeople

Within the health service, many crises have a devastating impact on patients and their families. It is important that the spokesperson is genuinely sympathetic to the impact on patients and can demonstrate empathy. Assign the most relevant and suitable senior staff to take on the role of spokespeople.

Identify a primary spokesperson and a back-up spokesperson.

Staying On Top Of The Story

- Set up a communication process with the media as quickly as possible through your local communications team.
- Know the facts and prepare the messages (use the Message Grid on page 8). Focus on the tough questions and negative messages.
- Anticipate and practice new questions as the story evolves.

- Monitor all media coverage including social media. Advise your local communications team promptly if you spot inaccurate reporting so there is an opportunity to correct it.

Key Pointers

- Acknowledge where there is a problem and empathise. If necessary, say sorry, address concerns and communicate changes or improvements
- Talk about people first, the system second and money third
- Aim to be the single most authoritative source of information on the crisis

Questions About An Individual Case

- You can explain that to protect the confidentiality of those involved, you cannot comment in detail on the individual circumstances of the case - follow up with what you can talk about in terms of the wider issue.
- Your tone should demonstrate empathy and respect for what people have been through.

- Offer clear information and explain what you do know.
- If relevant, explain that there is a complaints management system to receive and respond to feedback. In the first instance, people should get in touch with the hospital or health service unit involved. If they do not get a satisfactory response, they can contact 'Your Service Your Say' and the details are on hse.ie

The 'Doorstep' Interview

A 'doorstep' interview is one that has not been arranged beforehand. However, it is rarely a total surprise.

During a crisis, the media will want to be close to the action and may be present outside the location of a meeting, outside the Court House or Coroner's Court or even outside your place of work.

Whether or not you decide to give an interview, it is likely that you will be filmed, photographed or recorded if you have to pass the media. Be ready for this:

- Give yourself time to prepare
- Check your appearance and be aware of your demeanour



- Walk confidently and acknowledge the reporters politely with a nod without stopping, with your supporting team if possible
- Even if you do not have to walk past reporters and cameras, there may be long lensed cameras pointing in your direction.

Refuse To Give An Interview Or Comment

Saying “*No comment*” is very blunt and can come across negatively. It will almost certainly be broadcast.

If it is not appropriate to comment, explain this by saying “*It would be wrong of me to comment right now*” and then give a reason, for example:

- “*The investigation is just commencing*” or “*All the facts have not been established*”.
- “On the grounds of confidentiality the HSE does not publicly discuss the circumstances of any individual but we are happy to discuss them directly with the people concerned. Maintaining a patient’s confidentiality is not only an ethical requirement for the HSE, it is also a legal requirement under Data Protection. When a patient or family makes personal information public, this does not relieve the HSE of its duty to preserve/uphold patient confidentiality at all times”.

Say That You Will Give An Interview, But Not Now

- If this is the approach agreed by your local communications team, arrange a time and location to do the follow up interview.

- You could say, “*I’m sorry but I cannot give you an interview at this time. However I’d be happy to talk to you at...*” and indicate the time and location. Done well, this sounds reasonable if broadcast.
- Be aware that the reporters will be persuasive; they have spent time getting to the location and will want a quote or to record a refusal to comment, to use in print or to broadcast.

Give A Short Statement

- Plan your statement.
- When you face the reporters, there will be one or several questions thrown at you. Make your statement in response.
- Don’t read it, unless there are legal reasons why it has to be phrased exactly.
- Then immediately apologise for your lack of time for further discussion and leave.
- Think of the visual that will be filmed – what is the background and is it appropriate to the issue?

A Full Interview

- All the techniques for normal interviews apply. Use the Message Grid on page 8.
- If there are several reporters, address your response each time to the person who poses the question. Be conscious of your body language as you will be filmed and/or photographed from many angles. If you are seen to be looking about from left to right too much or too quickly, you may look out of control. Take your time.

5 AT A GLANCE useful phrases to help you prepare

If the question is not related to the interview topic, do not make up an answer or waffle. It is fine to say that you don't know and offer to find out:

“I don't have that detail, but I can see if we can get you that information”

To help with tricky questions and ensure you can bring the focus back to your key messages:

“I don't know... but what I do know is...”

“I wouldn't be in a position to talk about X specifically, but what I can say is...”

For machine gun questions, where many questions are fired all at once, pick the one question you want to answer or say:

“There's a number of questions there. I'll start with...”

If the reporter summarises your words inaccurately, say:

“I'm sorry but let me say it again...”

If the reporter drops in an inaccuracy in the middle of the question, you can say:

“Before I answer you, can I just clarify...”





Don't repeat the question if it contains inaccuracies, even to deny it, as this may reinforce the wrong message. For example, if the reporter asks, *"Isn't it true you've been ignoring these complaints for months?"* Instead of *"We haven't been ignoring these complaints for months"*, you can say:

"We have an established system for dealing with complaints"

If you get your words muddled, stop and start again with:

"Let me put it another way..."

You do not have to be interrupted, instead, say:

"One moment... I'd like to finish...."

Don't let the reporter switch topics until you get your message across:

"Before we tackle that, I need to add..."

"There is a bigger issue here, and that's....."

Start important points with signal expressions, such as:

"The real issue is..."

"The most important issue is..."

"I feel strongly that..."



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