

## Media 102 for Homeopaths

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**Abstract:** As homeopathy grows in popularity, it is appearing more and more in the media both print and broadcast. As homeopaths, we are likely to be contacted by reporters for quotes. This article, building on the information given in a previous one (1)<sup>1</sup>, prepares you for that interview and gives useful tips when dealing with the media, including TV.

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Imagine one day you receive a call from a reporter asking you about homeopathic medicine. Thoughts race through your head, ranging from "here's my chance to tell the world about the great benefits of this medicine" to being stumped for words.

Unfortunately as homeopathic medicines become more popular and successful, they also may grow into a larger target for skeptics or media struggling to attract an audience through sensationalized stories.

To help you represent homeopathic medicines and yourself as true and best as possible, here are some helpful tips on how to work with the media and prepare for an interview.

### **Be Prepared**

- 1. Do your research:** Research both the reporter who will interview you and the media outlet (publication or show). Does the reporter or the media outlet have a history of pro or con articles pertaining to alternative medicine? What is their purpose or mission? Who is their audience? If you're caught off guard by a reporter calling, simply ask about their deadline and tell them that you will return their call. Then prepare.
- 2. Evaluate whether to engage in a discussion with the reporter:** After Step 1, you should have an idea if the interview will be friendly or adversarial. The decision to engage is easy if you feel the article will benefit you and homeopathic medicines, or at least be presented in a fair and balanced manner.

Conversely, if you feel the article will be biased against homeopathy, weigh the risks. How many people will see the article? Is the audience important to you? Will the article live on via a website? You may be tempted to think this writer just needs to be educated on the facts. While that might be true, your input most likely will not convince a known skeptic. Keep your communications with a skeptic very brief, in writing (email), and don't stray from a predetermined message. Remember, declining the opportunity might be the

most beneficial option.

A good example of a large syndicated newspaper interview which appeared across the country in other newspapers and was largely biased by the views of one frequently published skeptic can be found on the Chicago Tribune website. (2,3) Conversely, a very positive article can be found in Pathways magazine. (4) Although the Tribune article can be viewed as contriving a conflict, it did present homeopathy is a somewhat favorable light to a mass audience. In this email interview, at least one of the homeopathic physician interviewees (TF) was notified that a skeptic would be presenting the other side (EE). Although the implications of that were not fully understood by the physician prospectively, they were very clear when the article appeared in print. A comment was accepted for publication sometime later (3), but the readership of that was almost certainly a lot less. This would be an example of when, upon hearing that the skeptic will be interviewed as well, the practitioner might want to reconsider whether to even participate in the interview.

3. **Ask questions:** Ask the reporter for his questions before the interview takes place. If he declines, ask for the general concept of the article.
4. Get **professional help:** Call a trade association or one of the makers of homeopathic medicines. These organizations have staff members devoted to media relations that would welcome the chance to help you prepare for an interview.

### **Developing Key Messages**

Remember, readers love controversy and in today's environment where media are struggling and competing for an audience, the media person's goal might be to attract an audience through a sensationalized piece. It doesn't matter if a reporter likes and personally uses homeopathic medicines or if he thinks homeopathic medicines are placebos. Homeopathic medicines are controversial and that makes them a great story to attract readers and viewers. Understanding this will help you stick to key big-picture messages and resist saying something that could be taken out of context and used to sensationalize a story. You might be tempted to educate the reporter on homeopathy in detail. Resist! You are not training someone to become a homeopath or instructing a patient on how to use the medicine.

**What your audience wants to know:** Write down three main points you want to convey during the interview but remember, it's not about you. It's about the audience and what they care about. For example, the general public most likely would want to know about the benefits of the medicine to them rather than the technical aspects of the medicines. Your three key points might be:

1. Homeopathic medicines are safe and have no side effects.
2. Homeopathic medicines are effective.
3. Homeopathic medicines are easy to use.

**What the reporter wants to talk about:** You also have to factor in what the reporter wants to write about. For example, if article has an economic angle to it, frame the above messages

appropriately. Remember, the reporter is the gatekeeper to your audience. Try framing our three messages above like so:

1. **Homeopathic medicines are safe and have no side effects:** These medicines are growing in popularity because of their inherent safety. People, especially moms, are now looking for safer, more natural choices.
2. **Homeopathic medicines are effective:** More than 200 years on the world market confirms the value of homeopathic medicines as affordable personalized treatment while two centuries of successful medical use throughout the world provides a strong empirical basis of proof for the safety and efficacy of homeopathic medicines.
3. **Homeopathic medicines easy to use:** The last reason I think these medicines are becoming popular in the U.S. is because they are so easy for people to use. Like I said, they don't have to worry about side effects. The medicines are affordable -generally between \$7 and \$14. And now people can find them easily. This wasn't always the case. You might have to go out of your way to find them in a natural products store. But now, because of the demand for these medicines, you can find the most commonly used medicines in national drugstores or Whole Foods Markets without a prescription.

Volunteer to provide the reporter with a written summary of information, main points or statistics.

### **Delivering Key Messages**

Now that you have developed your three key messages, either keep these points in front of you if interviewed over the phone or practice them out loud to prepare for a TV interview.

**Be proactive:** Interviews are a two-way street. It's your interview too, so don't reactively wait for a question. Seize any opportunity to share your message; keep your main objectives in mind, and provide examples to support them. (For example: homeopathy is safe. I have seen good results with my patients and my patients like that they don't have to worry about side effects.)

**Bridging:** "Bridging" refers to redirecting the interview back to topics you want to discuss. Just because you are asked a question doesn't mean you have to answer it. To make this transition, use phrases like, "What you might find interesting is...", or "It's important for you to understand...", or "That's **an** interesting question, but the real issue is..."

Stick to your subject—the facts about homeopathy—and do not speculate! It's okay to say you don't know the answer, especially if it's out of your area of expertise. Try this bridge: "That's not my area of expertise, but I can tell you..." Then offer to find answers to questions you may not know or recommend someone more knowledgeable to the reporter.

If you get off track, try "Let me take a step back for a moment" or "First I'd like to say..."

Don't repeat a negative question on camera. Think of phrases that can help you deflect a question.

For example: "That's a common misperception, but..." or "I understand why there is a concern, but in reality..."

**Beware of techniques to draw out information:** If you are not giving a reporter what they want to hear, beware of their tactics. Some reporters may play dumb or act as if they are your friend. They may say cite an "anonymous" source in order to have you correct information or ask your opinion about something. They may purposely try to make you angry or emotional. All of these tactics may be meant to draw out statements from you. Bridge, stick to your key messages, and after you've said what you wanted to convey, wrap up the interview. Tell them that's all the time you have.

A good example of another situation in which many physicians have experience with drawing out techniques is during a legal deposition. In a deposition, the attorney(s) on the other side are trying to get the physician to reveal something that could be useful to them and often damaging to the physician. Just as most physicians today would highly consider consulting with an attorney on their side to prepare for such a deposition, homeopaths should consider prepping for a high profile interview, possibly with the assistance of a media consultant. Remember, this is the media consultant's area of expertise. The physician's area of expertise is in diagnosing and treating patients.

**Make it personal to the audience:** Use the word "you" a lot. Give examples that are important to the audience (i.e. "taking «this homeopathic medicine» will get you back to work quicker' or "you won't have to fight with the kids to take the medicine").

### **Anticipated Questions and Simple Answers**

- **What are homeopathic medicines:** "Homeopathy uses natural substances in micro-doses to relieve symptoms. The active ingredients in homeopathic medicines are diluted plants, animals and minerals that relieve the same symptoms they cause at full strength. For example a micro-dose of a coffee bean helps nervousness." (And then BRIDGE to a subject that you want to talk about, like it's because of these diluted natural ingredients that the medicines are safe and have no reported side effects. Keep it short and simple.)
- **How do homeopathic medicines work:** They work safely and naturally with the body instead of working against the body by masking symptoms. For example, unlike a cough suppressant, homeopathic medicines for coughs help loosen chest congestion and make a cough more productive.
- **Is there research that show the efficacy of homeopathic medicines:**
  - More than 200 years of successful use of these medicines throughout the world has provided a strong basis of proof for their safety and usefulness. The clinical effectiveness of homeopathic medicines has been demonstrated over that time via physician's experience and traditional clinical trials.
  - Clinical research is providing evidence of the efficacy of these medicines, and basic laboratory research is confirming the biological activity of highly diluted substances

and helping the scientific community to better understand their mechanism of action. An extensive list of peer reviewed research studies is listed on the website for the National Center for Homeopathy (<http://nationalcenterforhomeopathy.org/research>). The AIH website ([homeopathyusa.org](http://homeopathyusa.org)) also has a very useful research section. A very good site which reviews homeopathic research is [audesapere.in](http://audesapere.in). An excellent source of open access basic science research in homeopathy is the International Journal of high dilution research (<http://www.feg.unesp.br/~ojs/index.php/ijhdr/index>).

- One thing that all experts can agree upon is that the exact mechanism of action for homeopathic medicine is still under research. This is also true for many conventional medications. However, not knowing how something works doesn't mean that it doesn't work or that we should not take advantage of its benefits as shown daily by common usage. It took researches 70 years to find out how Aspirin worked but during those 70 years, many people benefited from Aspirin. Another example that can be used is that of the airplane. Not being an aeronautical engineer, I cannot understand how something so massive can actually fly. But just because I don't understand it (as the skeptics don't understand how homeopathy can work), that doesn't affect the planes ability to fly. One could mention the newest nanoparticle research, but this may still be too preliminary to be convincing to skeptics.
- **Have homeopathic medicines been tested for safety:** Homeopathic medicines have been used for more than 200 years and have established a remarkable safety record over that time. Homeopathic medicines offer some of the safest choices for self-treatment.
- **Are homeopathic medicines safe to use without consulting a physician:** Homeopathic medicines can be used to relieve symptoms of a wide range of acute health conditions. These include self-treatable conditions such as allergies, coughs, colds, flu, stress, arthritis pain, muscle pain, teething, etc. They can also be used by trained physicians to relieve symptoms of more serious conditions and many chronic diseases.
- **Are homeopathic medicines regulated:**
  - The manufacturing and marketing of homeopathic medicines has been regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) since 1938. Homeopathic medicines must be manufactured under FDA Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs) and labeling guidelines. FDA has published a specific guideline for manufacturing and marketing homeopathic medicines entitled "Conditions under which Homeopathic Medicines May be Marketed" (FDA CPG 7132.15).
  - There is a well established framework of guidelines, regulations and quality standards enforced by the FDA through routine pharmaceutical manufacturing site inspections and surveillance on marketed products.
  - [Insert action] against homeopathy would be a disservice to the public and a move toward reducing an individual's choice for something as personal as a healthcare therapy—especially one that is renowned for its safety and medical-economic value.

**General Summary:** Homeopathy is a 200-year-old system of medicine used successfully by many tens of millions of patients worldwide. It has a laudable and well documented clinical record and there are literally hundreds of high quality, peer-reviewed basic science, pre-clinical and clinical studies showing it works. (See the website for the National Center for Homeopathy or AIH for a list of research papers.)

### Tips Specifically for TV Interviews

- **Understand the different types of media:** Complex ideas are best explained through print (newspapers and magazines). Keep to simple sound bites for television interviews. A TV show only needs a couple sound bites from you; however, the reporter may try to interview you for a long time in order to pull out just one attention-grabbing sentence from you. Keep to your key messages. Be brief, simple, concise, and conversational, and use easy to understand language. If the reporter repeats his question, repeat your answer. It's better to repeat yourself rather than go off course. Avoid explaining in detail complicated subjects like the law of similars and how the medicines work, dilution levels or manufacturing process, research, etc. However, be prepared to answer questions about these subject in simple, brief terms and bridge back to your key message (See the section on "Anticipated Questions and Simple Answers" for more details about this, including examples of keeping complex ideas simple.)
- **Practice:** Practice delivering your three key messages out loud in concise, conversational and easy-to-understand phrases. Try practicing in the car. Have someone ask you questions for a mock interview.
- **Setting:** If a TV crew comes to you, chose a plain, uncluttered background to be interviewed, even if that means temporarily clearing out a space.
- **Body language:** Look at the interviewer. Don't look at the camera. Look the reporter in the eye. Don't fold your arms. Keep your arms and hands loose. It's okay to gesture to emphasize points. Sit forward and act enthusiastic. And smile!
- **Appearance:** Don't wear white. Don't wear patterns, especially small patterns. Wear something simple, like a solid color. Bright colors may be distracting or make you look pale. Don't wear big, loud, distracting jewelry. Do wear something in which you are comfortable and confident. You don't have to wear a suit but you should aim to look respectable-like someone from whom you would take advice about medicine. Also, media experts say what people look at the most for men on TV are ties. For women, it's lipstick!

Remember, TV is a visual medium and needs a visual.

In conclusion, by being prepared for media interviews either in print or on TV, homeopaths can help to elevate homeopathy to its rightful place at the medical practice table. In this way we can work to rebrand homeopathy from it's current misconception in the mass media as "just placebo,"

to its rightful brand as a safe and effective therapy for all.

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