MEDIA RELATIONS TIPS FOR ORTHODONTISTS AND STAFF

October is National Orthodontic Health Month (NOHM) – which gives you a great reason to reach out to your local media for potential coverage, and to generate word-of-mouth-marketing (“buzz”) about:

- You – the expert in orthodontic care by virtue of your advanced, specialty education in orthodontics and limiting your practice to the specialty of orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics;
- The professional and social success attained by your patients, whom you helped in achieving healthy, beautiful smiles;
- Your practice;
- The orthodontic specialty; and
- The dental, physical and emotional benefits of orthodontic care for adults, teens and children.

Work with your marketing staff to determine:

- Your message;
- Appropriate media;
- Timing.

Develop a Media Contact List

Develop a target list of the media sources (online news sources, newspapers, magazines, TV, radio stations, bloggers) which cover your community. You may be able find a list of media outlets online – use a search engine and enter the keywords “media outlets” and your city to see if you can find a general list to get started.

Be sure to include media who focus on adult women because they are the main healthcare decision-makers for families, including spouses, and themselves.

Many media outlets publish the names of reporters under the “contact” section of their websites. If you don’t find the information you need, call each media outlet to get the names of the appropriate contact people. Make sure to get the correct spelling of names; email addresses; and direct phone numbers, if possible. You can also follow reporters on Facebook and Twitter to get a sense of the types of stories they cover.

Decide what your message will be (permissible Halloween treats; candy buy-back program; appliance safety during Halloween, age 7 check-ups, adult treatment, etc.). (The AAO offers an easy-to-customize press release for National Orthodontic Health Month in the online how-to guide.)
Reporters are always looking for good stories and content, and if they are not able to act on a story themselves, they may be able to direct you another source.

Newspaper/magazine contacts include:
- Medical/health editor or reporter
- Lifestyles editor or reporter
- Family/parenting editor or reporter
- Women's editor or reporter
- Children/youth editor or reporter

Small weekly newspapers may have only two or three editors. In that case, the editor or managing editor would be the appropriate contact. In any case, it’s OK to send information to more than one person.

TV contacts include:
- Medical/health reporters
- TV segment producers, including those for early morning newscasts, noon newscasts, or public affairs programs
- Assignment editor for ‘day of coverage’, (such as weighing candy for the Halloween buy-back program) and breaking news

Radio contacts include: news/public affairs director; producers or hosts of morning- or afternoon-drive programs.

“Mommy bloggers” are also an important resource. To find bloggers in your area, go to a search engine and enter the keywords “mommy bloggers” and the name of your city.

If you’re not sure who to send a news release to, it’s perfectly acceptable to call and ask.

Keep your list of media outlets and contacts in a spreadsheet, which is a great way to store and sort information. Be sure to update your list regularly because contact people will change.

Look online for a starter list. Google “media outlets – your city” for free information, or lists to purchase, or check community sources, such as the Chamber of Commerce. Other sources include www.easymedialist.com and the Internet Public Library.

Patients or parents of patients may work for local media outlets. Consider asking them about appropriate contacts at their place of business.

Prepare a concise news release on the idea/topic you are suggesting for coverage and try to keep it to a single page. Be sure to include contact information at your practice, with an after-hours cell phone contact, in case the reporter has questions or needs additional information. It is best to have two people two contact. Make it easy for the reporter to reach your office.

For media coverage on the ‘day of’ an event or activity, develop a media alert which covers the basic “Who,” “What,” “When,” “Where,” and “Why.” Keep in mind that reporters are looking for
objective news, and will pass on stories which are transparently self-serving or targeted at a narrow audience. Their goal is to provide ‘news you can use’ to the entire community. Your value is as an industry expert and someone who can provide timely, accurate information and insight on stories which pertain to your area of expertise.

**NOTE:** Many media outlets do not allow attachments to emails. Therefore, cut and paste the text of your news release into the body of the email. If you have high resolution photos available, note that in your email. Do not send unsolicited attachments.

**Timely Follow Up**
Be sure to follow up on your media outreach with a friendly call or email.

If you have sent written publicity proposing a significant story, offering significant breaking news, or seeking coverage of an event, editors may appreciate receiving follow-up calls. If an editor asks that you re-send materials to his or her attention, do so promptly.

If an item is not exactly what an editor is seeking for publication, he or she will often say so. Unless the editor seems pressed for time, it’s fine to ask for guidance about what types of items might be of interest to him or her.

If the editor tells you that he or she is on a **deadline**, it is best to end the conversation politely and quickly, and ask when it would be convenient for you to call back.

Once you make a connection with a media contact, cultivate the relationship by following them on social media or congratulating them on a good story with a quick email. Even if your initial outreach doesn’t result in a story, you never know what may hit a hot button down the road. Position yourself as a source for any stories they may be working on in the future. You want to make sure they can count on you for accurate, timely information.

**Preparing for an In-Office Visit**
If applicable, invite reporters to your office to get a firsthand demonstration of the advances in orthodontic treatment and appliances. Ask the reporter if they would like to talk with patients, either during the visit or over the phone. Seek permission from the patients you have in mind for a reporter to talk with them (keep HIPAA in mind). Patients typically do an outstanding job of explaining the benefits of orthodontic treatment. If you wish to feature a patient who is under 18, make sure you get a signed release from their parents/legal guardian.

Focus on the features and benefits of orthodontics. If asked about costs, answer in a straightforward, matter-of-fact manner. Emphasize the lifetime value of orthodontics. Inform the reporter that orthodontists strive to make orthodontic care affordable for patients and families, that most orthodontists offer payment plans, and will work with patients and their families to
arrive at payment plans that fit within their budgets. This underscores the fact that orthodontic care is one of the best values in healthcare.

Keep in mind that your audience is the average person, not a dental professional. Avoid jargon (to the public, an appliance is a refrigerator and harmony is a musical term). Speak in easy-to-understand layman’s language that a patient or parent would understand.

Also keep in mind that when it comes to media coverage, you cannot control the ultimate outcome of the coverage. You can suggest content and provide timely, accurate information; however, final editing decisions will be made by the reporter, editor or producer.

Be prepared for a reporter to say no if you ask to read or see a copy of the story in advance of its date of publication/airing. Most media outlets will not accommodate such requests. In some cases, but not all, print reporters may be willing to read back to you portions of a story that includes your quotes.

Congrats, you’ve got the interview! Now what? If you secure interest from the media and schedule an interview, following are some ideas and tips.

About Your Audience and Your Message
Remember in essence you are speaking to is the general lay public and they have a collective question: What’s in it for me? The answer is that orthodontic treatment helps people. As an orthodontist, your most important message is how orthodontic treatment benefits the patient. Everything you do is geared toward improving the patient’s health and well-being. And, as an orthodontist, you are concerned about the WHOLE patient—and that includes orthodontic health, dental health, general physical health and overall welfare. Regardless of the materials or techniques used to affect orthodontic treatment, the purpose of the treatment is to benefit the patient.

Key Messages
These are some key messages to communicate about orthodontics:

- The lifetime value of orthodontic treatment
- All children should get a check-up with an orthodontic specialist no later than age 7
- Adult treatment (healthy teeth can be moved at any age)
- Affordability (via convenient payment plans)
- Orthodontists receive an additional two to three years of specialized education beyond dental school to learn the proper way to align and straighten teeth
- Only orthodontists (those who have completed the above educational requirements) may call themselves “orthodontists” and only orthodontists are admitted for membership in the American Association of Orthodontists.

Talking Points
Here is additional messaging to reinforce your expertise and help keep the interview on track:
• Nearly one patient in four today is an adult.
• You’re never too old for orthodontic treatment – healthy teeth can be moved at any age.
• AAO Age 7 Check-Up Recommendation (all children should get a check-up with an orthodontic specialist no later than age 7)
  o Possible outcomes from a check-up
    ▪ Treatment indicated, but beginning when child is older
    ▪ Treatment indicated, should begin soon
    ▪ Treatment is not likely to be needed/parental piece of mind
• The goal of the orthodontist is to provide the most appropriate treatment at the most appropriate time
• How early treatment, if indicated, can guide the growth of face and jaws
• Most patients begin orthodontic treatment between the ages of 9 and 14
• Describe what causes teeth to move (constant application of force) and what happens physiologically/biologically to permit movement
  o The physiological process of moving teeth is the same in adults, teens and children.
• Define areas patients are responsible for to ensure the success of their orthodontic treatment
  o Describe what you tell your patients about their role in successful treatment, such as how often to brush daily, flossing, any other cleaning aids, mouth washes, and regular cleanings at dentist.
• Retainers—what they do, why they are important, and how long patients must wear them after active treatment, what the options are (Essix, Hawley, permanent)
• Talk about any new techniques/treatments of which you might be aware
• Ni-Ti wires (developed by NASA) and any advantages they might have over other wires
• demonstrate the “memory” properties of heat-activated Ni-Ti wires
• Mini-brackets
• Fluoride-releasing cements
• Clear aligners (if appropriate)
• Lingual braces (if appropriate)
• TADs
• Self-ligating braces
• Invisible/next-to-invisible appliance options

Remember, the audience wants to know “What’s In It for me?”

Offer to have patients show off their braces or other appliances (keeping HIPAA in mind) for the story. Perhaps they can tell the reporter why they like their orthodontic treatment and how it is helping them. Often the good news about orthodontics is best told through the patient who has benefited from treatment.

Smile, relax and be confident. You are the expert and know more about the subject than the person you’ll be talking with. There is no such thing as ‘off the record.’ Say only that which you
want to hear on the air or see in print or online. Think patients, patients, patients – everything you do is for the benefit of your patients. Whatever you say needs to be couched in terms of what is best for the patient.

PRACTICE out loud with someone—a staff member, your spouse, or someone from the AAO Communications and Marketing staff. If doing a TV interview, self-record a practice interview with someone. Decide what you like and what you want to improve. For a radio interview, do the same with an audio recorder.

Offer to provide the reporter and/or producer suggested questions to ask. It will be helpful for the reporter (who will appear to know the right questions to ask, and it will help you guide the interview to areas you would like to discuss). For any type of interview, if you don't know the answer, it is perfectly acceptable to say so and offer to research the question and get back to the reporter with the information. Be sure to ask what their deadline is and respond in time.

Whenever possible, suggest that a TV or newspaper interview be done at your office. You will be in comfortable, familiar surroundings. The reporter/editor will get a better feel for who you are and what you do. It will be advantageous for you, too, because you have the ability to show and tell the reporter/editor about your practice. In the case of radio interviews, do your best to schedule the interview in-studio rather than over the phone. An in-person interview, where both people can read body language and nonverbal cues, can result in a more engaging interview and personal rapport. It can often lead to you becoming a ‘go to’ source for future stories.

In addition, the sound quality in a studio is superior to that of a telephone. However, if scheduling makes an-in-studio interview impossible and you schedule a phone interview, do your best to use a landline as opposed to a cell phone.

Attire
When an interview is taking place at your office, wear your normal office attire. Or, if you do not ordinarily do so, you may supplement your normal attire with a lab coat, to add a professional look. For interviews taking place outside your office, dress in standard business attire such as a suit and dress shoes.

Important Tips for TV interviews – In your office:

- If you will be doing a TV interview, keep in mind that the camera likes to see action. “Talking Heads” (when the guest and interviewer are talking and there is no action) do not make for good television.
- Have typodonts available
- Demonstrate how wires move teeth
- Show different kinds of customized retainers
- Demonstrate computer morphing software (if available in your office)
**Tips for In-Studio Interviews**

Bring as many props as you can – and let the station know what you are bringing. Producers like lots of “show and tell” – it makes the interview much more interesting.

If you have great visuals, such as before and after images, email them to the producer in advance. Make sure the file is named with a description of the image depicts.

Provide your telephone number and office website – TV stations will often run this information at the end of the segment.

Have a National Orthodontic Health Month poster available to use as a backdrop for any type of TV or print interview. Simply print a color 8 ½ x 11 image of the poster and have it mounted on an easel-back cardboard (most quick print/copy stores have these available at very low cost).

Many TV interviews will be live, which means there aren’t any do-overs. It also means that your energy, knowledge and demeanor will shine through the lens.

Practice being interviewed before the interview. Use your personal video recorder and have someone act the role of reporter. Then critique your performance. What did you like? What would you do or say differently?

**Men**
Wear a suit and a long-sleeved shirt. Avoid white shirts. Solid (no pattern) blue, tan or gray shirts look better on camera. Wear a simple tie; keep jewelry to a minimum. Be sure your socks are long enough that bare leg does not show, and that the socks are darker than the suit. Make sure your shoes are polished. If make-up is offered, accept it. Without make-up, lights tend to bounce off the subject with an unpleasant shine. A touch of make-up lets your face absorb the light and gives you a more natural look. Be sure you are clean-shaven (if not wearing a beard). A 5 o'clock shadow can be distracting for the viewer.

**Women**
Wear a suit with a sleeved blouse, professional looking slacks, or a dress. It is helpful to have a waistband, belt or pocket that the microphone can be clipped onto. Solid (no pattern) blue, purple, winter white, burgundy and gray look good on camera. Wear close-toed shoes. Wear make-up, and don’t forget lipstick – it brightens your look on camera. Do not wear large, flashy earrings or necklaces – they can be distracting.

**For Everyone**
Turn cell phones off or on silent, or even better, keep them in the car or back at the office. Do not chew gum or eat mints on the air. If you need to use the restroom, do so before being wired with the mic. If standing during the interview, keep your jacket buttoned. If seated for the interview, unbutton your jacket, sit up straight, and sit with legs together (men may cross legs at the knee). Look at the person asking the questions, and maintain good eye contact. Keep in mind that you are having a normal, natural conversation with the host. DO NOT look at, or for, the camera, it will find you. Use hand gestures appropriately. Keep your face expressive. Smile
when appropriate—after all, creating healthy, beautiful smiles is what you’re all about! If you normally wear glasses, wear them for the TV interview. Speak clearly. Avoid orthodontic jargon Remember, to the general public, an appliance is a refrigerator. Keep your answers short.

Do a quick check before starting the interview, be sure that:

- Your hair is combed
- Your tie is straight
- Your teeth are clean

Always assume that your microphone is on. Say only that which you would want to hear on the air.

The Interview
Arrive at the designated interview place (your office, a studio, etc.) 15-20 minutes ahead of the appointed time. Producers/reporters appreciate you being ahead of time, as a guest running late can wreak havoc on the schedule of live TV or radio. Keep your answers brief, informative and to the point. If you will be working on or touching a patient, be sure to wear a lab coat, eye protection, a mask and gloves; and of course make sure the patient has signed a release ahead of time and keep it on file in the office.

Keep in mind that you do not control the content of the article or story; that is up to the reporter/editor/producer. But by providing thorough background information and answering questions truthfully, you contribute to a positive story about your specialty and your practice.

Market Your Success!

Many television stations will post stories online – make sure to link to them on your website or social media pages. If you have a great newspaper story, make copies of it and have in your waiting room. In these days of “shared” content, TV stations are happy to have you promote your segment. Snap a few pictures of the in-office interviews – these are great for social media sites to promote your practice.

Questions?

Please feel free to call upon your AAO Communications and Marketing Department staff as you plan and execute your media outreach: Pam Paladin (ext. 524), Burt Bollinger (ext. 556) or Linda Gladden (ext. 535), at 800-424-2841. Or e-mail them at ppaladin@aaortho.org, bbollinger@aaortho.org or lgladden@aaortho.org.