

## Media Relations for Donate Life Month

Media relations can be a very effective and inexpensive way to achieve a particular objective (i.e. *filling the registry!*), but if done incorrectly or without an appropriate amount of strategy, planning or follow-through, it can be either a frustrating waste of time or, in the worst circumstances, counterproductive to your goal.

If you are reading this document right now it probably means you have made a professional decision to pursue a career other than media relations (good decision) and, as such, you may not have the time or gut-level interest in organizing and coordinating the necessary media outreach to accomplish your Donate Life Month goals (*filling the registry!*)

The good news is that there are people who can help. Your hospital or employer most likely has a person or persons who are media relations specialists. If so, contact them now. Tell them about Donate Life Month and that you and your colleagues are determined to help educate the public about organ donation during Donate Life Month (and throughout the year.) They will know which media outlets/contacts might be the best to target in your area. You can also call me; in fact, I'd really like you to call me. I generally sit in a boring cubicle all day trying to get reporters to take my calls and answer my e-mails, so I welcome the opportunity to speak to people. Plus, I am the designated media relations person for the UW Organ Procurement Organization, so naturally I would love to help out when I can. Here's my contact info:

**Gian Galassi**  
**Senior media specialist, UW Health Public Affairs**  
**ggalassi@uwhealth.org**  
**608-263-5561 (office)**  
**608-235-2926 (cell)**

Together (you, me, your PR specialist and OPO hospital development specialist, or some combination thereof) can strategize ways to transform your event, story idea, or other DLM ideas into results (*filling the registry!*). Or not. Remember, just because we think something is newsworthy or important, does not mean that the news organizations will. There are a lot of competing interests at play in newsrooms these days as well as dwindling resources, making thoughtful media outreach strategy more important than ever. To help improve our chances, we have identified a few ideas that we believe will likely have more potential for coverage and long term impact (*filling the registry!*):

1. **Donor/family/recipient stories:** a reporter's job is to make a connection with readers/viewers/listeners and to make even the most complex story compelling. Stories about families that have a personal connection to donation/transplant are always the most compelling. Think about families you have served over the last year and let us know about them. The OPO can always reach out to those families to see if they'd be willing to share their stories. In fact, due to HIPAA rules, we must contact them to obtain their permission.
2. **TV and radio interviews:** Stations are always interested in having people discuss timely topics on their programs—be it a radio talk show, a television morning program, etc. However, these interviews need to be arranged in advance and often require connecting with the various producers/anchors of those programs. I would be happy to help you identify the appropriate outlets and contact for this approach.

3. **Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor:** All newspapers typically run letters to the editor, which are written in response to recent coverage in that specific paper. It is a good way to extend the message after a story has already run . . . and the time investment is minimal. On the other hand, Op-Eds are short opinion pieces (generally 750 words maximum) written by experts in the field (that includes medical professionals who work on donation issues and people who have experience with donation, like family members, recipients, or people on the waiting list.) Not all papers run op-eds, while others make room for “guest columns,” which essentially serve the same purpose. Do your research to see what your paper offers and note the style, length and tone of those pieces. There are tips that can increase your chances of getting your piece published. Talk to your PR person or call me to help you craft a piece that is not only accurate, but also has the highest possibility for pickup. We can also reach out to donor families, transplant recipients and folks on the waiting list in your area.
4. **Special Events:** These are tough to sell sometimes. First of all, the amount of media coverage you get for an event does not always depend on how well-organized or cool your event is. Unfortunately, because events are time-specific, media resources can easily be diverted from your event to cover breaking news — the definition of which you may not always agree. The less compelling your event, though, the easier it would be for reporters to cover something else. For example, an information table at your local mall can easily be trumped by a cat stuck in a tree. On the other hand, a really cool flag-raising event featuring President Obama and/or a Green Bay Packers player, will have a better chance of surviving feline misfortune – but it still does not guarantee anything. Bottom line: By all means, plan an event if you like them, but don’t expect media will be there no matter what. Consider other ideas from our online tool kit to maximize your effort and results.
5. **Reactive media relations:** Sometimes the news media will hear about Donate Life Month all on their own, or they just get a wild idea to do a story about organ donation in general. That’s great. Embrace it. If you get a call from a reporter, find out what exactly they are looking for, what their deadline is and then tell them you or somebody else will get back to them promptly. Call or e-mail your hospital/employer’s PR office and let them know. Then, because most often their requests will require at least some input from the OPO or Transplant Center, give me a call. I can route that information to the correct person and also help coordinate the inquiry on our end. Then together we can respond to the reporter in a way that respects their deadline, delivers the information they need, and tries to maximize the message we want to convey—depending on the specifics of the request.

One of the documents included in this toolkit will be a regularly-updated fact sheet about organ donation and transplantation. It should alleviate the need to go searching for the most basic facts about donation and/or transplant. By using this resource, it will at least allow us to be on the same page when discussing numbers/data publicly. Regardless of the tactic you choose, it should do one or all of the following:

- Increase and clarify public knowledge about organ donation/transplant/waiting list
- Increase favorable attitudes about organ donation
- *Fill the registry!*

Again, call me to discuss your ideas. I’m here to help you. Really.