



**How to Prepare for a Television Interview**  
**Prepared by the EAST Advocacy and Outreach Ad Hoc Committee**

Smile, you're on TV. Viewers are evaluating both the message and the messenger. Good posture, business clothes and eye contact project confidence and credibility. Conversely, poor posture, casual clothes and wandering eyes suggest insecurity and unreliability. As someone who is soon to be beamed into living rooms across the city, it's your job to present yourself in a good light. Of course, you have to have something to say as well. And, you have to say it in a manner and fashion that can be easily understood by all. Think in terms of metaphors e.g. the heart is a like pump, sun exposure is cumulative just like putting miles on a tire, the brain is like a sophisticated network of computers, when you talk. You are not communicating if people are not sure what you are saying.

**Tips for a successful television interview:**

- 1) Dress appropriately – Tune in a head of time to see what other guests are wearing. If men wear suits, wear one. Light, solid colored shirts and plain ties work well on TV. Try to avoid loud colors.
- 2) Manage those hands - It's natural to be nervous but don't let your nerves get the best of you. Watching your hands or shaking a leg can be a distraction to viewers. In an in-person interview, look at the reporter when speaking, not the camera.
- 3) Prepare two or three key points - Don't wait until the camera starts to roll to think about what you are going to say. Develop two or three key messages that you would like to share ahead of time.
- 4) Repeat the question - For example, if the question is "What are the complications associated with traumatic brain injury?" Your response might be, "The complications associated with traumatic brain injury are . . ." Oftentimes, the questions by the interviewer will be edited out of the story so it is important that your statements are able to stand on their own.
- 5) Speak slowly and clearly - When people are nervous, they tend to speak quickly and rush through answers. Take a deep breath and speak slowly. Avoid slang and technical jargon. Keep it simple – Think: communicate the information to a 7<sup>th</sup> grader.
- 6) Nothing is off the record – If you wouldn't feel comfortable seeing it on the front page of the New York Times, don't mention it. In general if you don't have anything positive or constructive to say, don't say it.

7) Anticipate questions ahead of time - Many reporters won't give you their questions ahead of time. But, you probably have a good idea of what they are. Write them down and rehearse them ahead of time. Also try to anticipate what the worse question could be and practice it. If worse comes to worse, you can always say I'll have to get back to you about that.

8) Remote interviews are different - National networks like FOX will sometimes sometime pay for specialists to be tape recorded in a local studio like Total Video. In this instance, you will be staring into a camera and talking to an anchor who could be in another city. To make the most of these opportunities, look directly into the camera and keep your hands in your lap. These are typically tight shots and you don't want your hands bouncing up on the screen.

- Keep answers short – a TV news story is less than one minute long.
- No jargon – Reporters are generalists. Do not assume they know much about the subject they are interviewing you about.
- Use transitions to bring the interview back to issues you want to discuss: “That may be a factor, but more importantly...”
- Use hooks that get the reporter to ask the question you want to answer....”That’s just one possible outcome.” What are the others?
- Turn negative questions into positive answers – do not repeat the reporter’s negative question as the opening sentence to your answer.
- Answer questions in terms of benefits to the audience (patients) and not to your organization.
- You are always “on the record”, and a few words from a sentence can be used as a sound bite and misconstrued, choose your words wisely so they must all flow together.