



*Public Relations Manual*  
*for Chapters Establishing a Presence*  
*in the Community*



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## Oncology Nursing Society Mission

The mission of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) is to promote excellence in oncology nursing and quality cancer care.

### Introduction

ONS works on behalf of its members to advance the oncology nursing specialty by fostering high standards of nursing practice, research, and education.

One of the goals of ONS is to serve as a national information source for the media, the healthcare industry, and others who are interested in the oncology nursing specialty.

To complement this national effort, plenty of public relations opportunities can be experienced through your own efforts at the community level. Our intent with this manual is to encourage you to become sensitive to opportunities that highlight your profession as well as your local organization and its products and services.

As oncology nurses, you should become ambassadors to your profession because you have the ability and incentive to influence public opinion on your field. This manual includes information that will assist you in working with the media to get the recognition you deserve as oncology nursing specialists.

## Public Relations Basics

Your chapter public relations (PR) program begins with chapter meetings, special events, and good work and recognition of your chapter and its individual members. An effective PR program can achieve the following goals.

### **Attract and Maintain a Strong Chapter Membership**

A good PR program attracts the interest of potential members and helps maintain consistently strong membership.

### **Public Recognition and Appreciation of Your Chapter and the Oncology Nursing Profession**

Notifying the community about upcoming chapter events that are open to the public, such as awareness weeks or fundraisers (e.g., fun runs), creates visibility for your chapter and attracts new members. These special events provide good subject matter for publicity while offering direct contact with the public.

Announcing chapter members' achievements is another valuable means of raising awareness about the oncology nursing specialty.

## Selecting a Public Relations Liaison

One person in your chapter should be selected as the PR liaison. Assigning this role to one person will enable the chapter to respond more effectively to media inquiries, coordinate publicity efforts, and ensure that consistent messages are sent to the media and to the public. The PR liaison will work closely with the chapter leadership to determine goals and story ideas as well as issues or mediums to avoid.

On behalf of the chapter's board of directors and membership, the PR liaison will contact the media to share ideas, serve as a contact for media calls, and coordinate the scheduling of interviews and appearances. Ideally, the PR liaison should have experience or an interest in working with the media. The liaison should be clearly identified as the contact person on any printed materials distributed to the media.

# An Effective Public Relations Plan

Publicity is news that is offered to the media by the newsmaker rather than stories sought out and reported by media employees. Before beginning any publicity activities, use a concise PR plan as a roadmap. The plan should consist of the following.

**Objectives:** What does your chapter want the PR plan to accomplish? For example, will the plan increase public awareness of oncology nursing or announce a special event?

**Target audiences:** Who must the chapter reach or influence to make the PR program work? In general, you should consider two types of audiences. Internal audiences are those closest to the organization, such as oncology nurses and the healthcare community. External audiences refer to “publics” targeted outside of the organization, such as the general public. When identifying audiences, you should determine priorities so that the PR program reflects the appropriate emphasis. For example, information encouraging oncology nurses to join the chapter should be targeted to internal publics, such as local hospitals or cancer centers. However, a story that features a chapter event or program that would interest the layperson should target external publics via the media.;

**Strategies:** What strategies or tools should the chapter employ to reach its targeted audiences? One strategy could be issuing a series of news releases from the chapter about an upcoming event or special lecture.

**Timetable:** What is a realistic time period for developing and carrying out strategies?  
Budget: The size and scope of a PR campaign depends on the amount of money available for the effort. Advertising usually is expensive compared to issuing news releases, which can be done by e-mail.



# News Story Ideas

Every chapter activity is a potential news story. Some are routine, such as your monthly chapter meeting. However, others have greater news value with the opportunity for more extensive media coverage.

- Announcement of newly-elected officers or installation of new officers
- Important or influential guest speakers
- Major chapter or chapter member awards
- Chapter anniversary
- Special programs open to the public
- Community service by chapter (e.g., breast screening, cancer support group)
- Nurses who passed the certification examination
- Presentations of oncology nursing-related awards
- A cancer-related issue that is receiving media attention or that is of particular interest to your community
- Announcement of promotions
- Fundraising efforts
- Highlights of the oncology nursing role or diversity within the specialty

In addition, Oncology Nursing Month is an excellent time to increase public awareness as well as recognize the valuable contributions of your colleagues. Remember that Oncology Nursing Month gives everyone in the community an opportunity to get involved. The community may offer support by lending space to hold an event, providing volunteers, underwriting the cost of posters, or donating money or free advertising space in print or broadcast media. Suggestions on how to promote Oncology Nursing Month can be found in the Membership section of the ONS website.

## Contacting the Media

Gone are the days of mailing or faxing press releases. E-mail is widely preferred as the method of communication for reporters, which makes contacting the media more efficient and cost effective. Keep e-mails short and to the point.

1. Read your local newspaper and note who writes the health column. E-mail contact information for this reporter probably will be at the end of the column. Check the calendar feature, and take note of submissions of events. Reporters change beats occasionally, so keep your contact list up to date.
2. Watch your local news channel and note who reports on community news and events. All TV stations have Web sites that include a “send us your news” feature. This feature makes it simple to copy and paste your news release into an information box and send it on its way. If you want to speak to a specific reporter directly, feel free to contact the station by phone to ask for the reporter’s phone number or e-mail address.
3. If your news release is about a certain individual, send it to the person’s daily and weekly hometown and community newspapers, employer newsletters, and alumni publications. Keep in mind that most reporting is assigned by an assignment editor, and you’ll probably find that e-mail contact will go to the “assignment desk.” The assignment editor will filter all reporting requests and decide what is newsworthy for reporting.

# News Release Tips

Your news release must contain some news worth reporting. Try to apply the same judgment most editors instinctively use to weigh the value of a news release.

- **Timeliness:** News is so named because it is current. Give plenty of advanced notice of upcoming happenings, then follow up with a media alert the day before the big event. Most reporters get their assignments for the day first thing in the morning. Weekends are usually slow news days, so if you have a Saturday event scheduled, call your local TV station on Friday to let them know about your event. The station just might send a reporter and camera.
- **Local angle:** The fact that an event is taking place locally may arouse some interest, at least in your community newspaper.
- **Importance:** Angle the story so that a layperson would find it interesting. Remember that what oncology nurses consider important may not be important to the general public. Try to deliver your news so that it will directly or indirectly affect the public. For example, it is not important (in news sense) that oncology nurses met for a lecture. However, the fact that the lecture was about how to better manage cancer pain makes it newsworthy to the general public.
- **Achievement:** Editors like stories about accomplishments. If your chapter presents awards, honors, or scholarships to any of its members, it might warrant some local media attention.
- **Interest:** Nurses caring for patients with cancer have a wealth of poignant human-interest stories that are worth sharing with the general public. These stories are not only interesting and touching; they acknowledge the challenging work of oncology nurses.

## How to Write a News Release

The goal of sending a news release to print media is to give the editor a usable piece of copy. A release that looks professional is more likely to be used and less likely to have material changed by the editor. Before you write your release, identify exactly what is newsworthy and to whom. You may wish to send your release to more than one contact person at a major newspaper. For example, the community events editor and/or the health section editor may want to cover your event. Also, determine how soon you will need to write and send your release for it to reach the media in time for the public to make reservations, send in applications, etc.



# Content of a News Release

- Identify your target audience (e.g., professional versus general public).
- Outline the major topics (who, what, when, where, why, and how) that you wish to relay to your audience.
- Have a clear objective.
- Include the most important information in the first paragraph. Follow up with more details about the event, issue, or individual.
- Include a quotation from an appropriate spokesperson to enhance the content of the release.
- Be as brief as possible in relaying your message.
- At the end of the release include a “boilerplate statement,” which describes your chapter and its mission.
- Prepare and present news releases before deadlines to ensure proper coverage of the event.
- Avoid using jargon that is familiar only to people in your organization.
- If you refer to something by initials or acronym, spell out the full name at first mention.

## Mechanics of a News Release

- Create an attention-grabbing headline for your e-mail subject line.
- Always prepare the copy double-spaced for readability.
- Include the name and address of the contact person (PR liaison) at the top.
- Include a one-line headline that summarizes the information that is found in the release.

## The summary helps the editor or reporter to know the content of the release quickly.

- Indicate the end of the release by using the symbol “###.”
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Keep a copy in the master file with a cover note detailing where and when the release was sent.
- Do not include attachments in your e-mail messages to reporters.



# Sample E-Mail News Release

## NEWS RELEASE

### CONTACT:

Jane Doe  
jdoe@xyzcancercenter.org  
415-555-1212

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **Greater Seaside Chapter of ONS Offers Free Breast Screening**

ANYTOWN, PA – Date – The Seaside Chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), through the support of Smith Pharmaceuticals Inc., will offer a free breast screening clinic at the downtown Brant Hotel from 9 am–2 pm on January 20.

According to Chapter President Cindy Myers, RN, MN, a clinical nurse specialist at Community Medical Center in Los Angeles, “Prevention and early detection is something that should become a priority for everyone. So, as a chapter, we wanted to make it accessible to those who are otherwise unable to afford it.”

For additional information regarding the clinic, contact Project Director Betty Wilson, RN, at 415-555-1212 or [bwilson@xxx.org](mailto:bwilson@xxx.org).

The Oncology Nursing Society chartered the Seaside Chapter of ONS, with more than 350 members, in 1982. The chapter is committed to promoting excellence in oncology nursing and quality cancer care.

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## Measuring Your Success

Alert members of your chapter to monitor the coverage you receive and urge them to inform their coworkers, families, and friends about upcoming coverage. Stress the importance of positive feedback to let the media know you saw and appreciated the coverage. Positive consumer response tells the media that nursing issues are of concern and of interest to the community. Keep a press book for any newspaper clippings that may feature your chapter or chapter members. Any television or radio broadcasts should be recorded. However, a media monitoring service can be expensive. A handy, free tool is Google Alerts, which provides e-mail updates of the latest relevant Google results (e.g., Web, news) based on your choice of topics. To create a Google Alerts account, visit [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts).

## Media Watch

As nurses, you are responsible for monitoring the image that the media projects about nursing. Realize that you can make a difference when an article, newscast, or television show depicts nursing incorrectly.

Whenever you see or read something that poorly represents your profession, take action either as an individual or as a chapter. Never write a letter (whether positive or negative) on behalf of your chapter or any other organization without clearing it through the organization's leadership. After the leadership gives you approval and official perspectives, draft the letter and allow the leadership to review it prior to signing.

Find out who wrote the story. The reporter's name generally will be in the byline at the top of a news story. Send your letter to the Letters to the Editor section of the newspaper or magazine. If you want to reinforce your impact, direct a copy of the letter to the reporter's editor as well. Call the newspaper and ask for the name of the editor of the section in which the story appeared, or simply address the letter to the editor, medical/health section, metro section, etc.

## Social Media and Social Networking

Although not yet used as a media outreach tool, ONS has a growing presence on external social networking Web sites with the goal of enabling peer-to-peer communication, increasing interaction among national conference attendees, and driving traffic to the ONS Web site. Sign-up is free and easy, and you control your privacy settings.



### Facebook

Connect with other oncology nurses, get updates on ONS news, and explore other social media-related sites. In addition, some ONS chapters have launched their own Facebook pages. Become a fan of the ONS Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/OncologyNursing](http://www.facebook.com/OncologyNursing) and search under the Links section for chapter pages.



### Twitter

Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? Join at <http://twitter.com> to start receiving ONS's updates or follow ONS news at <http://twitter.com/OncologyNursing> or <http://twitter.com/ONSmark>.



## Conclusion

As an oncology nurse, you are more than a caregiver with clinical knowledge and technical expertise; you are a teacher, a listener, and a shoulder to lean on. You help people through one of the most trying times of their lives. News about the work you do and the difference you make is important to share with the media. Celebrate your profession—you and your colleagues deserve it!

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