

Dissemination of Results

Reporting results, peer review &
Knowledge utilization - Knowledge
utilization

VERSION

1.0

This guideline is based on Amsterdam UMC Research Code - Chapter 10

Dealing with the media

Introduction

Public health research attracts a lot of attention from the media. Such interest has its advantages. Explaining research results publicly can make people aware of recent developments derived from science. It may also enable scientists and their institutions to justify the spending of public and private funds. Favorable reporting can speed up fundraising and, if sustained, give research institutions a reputation for solidity and expertise.

At the same time, there is a risk that information shared via the media may be too simplistic or too positive. Briefly communicating complex scientific messages to the general public is not easy and journalists prefer spectacular results. This may, for example, lead people to become overly optimistic about treatment possibilities, especially patients desperately hoping for an effective therapy.

Publicity pitfalls

The influence of third parties may compromise the full and unbiased sharing of scientific information. Companies or other parties in the private sector, may try to use scientific research results in their marketing, to generate and boost positive publicity for their products. In the public sector, leaders may want to marginalize or even suppress research results that are inconsistent with their political or policy goals. Charitable funds, which depend on political and societal support, may use the results of research they sponsor for their own profiling and branding. Patient organizations may depend on financial support from commercial companies that support their meetings or supply products for the patient group.

Researchers, too, might be tempted to overstate their findings and the implications of these findings. Spectacular results get much more media attention, which can be a significant asset when applying for new grants, promotion or tenure.

Social Media

Social media have a special role among media, as they offer opportunities to inform people in a more direct manner. This may be helpful for finding suitable participants for clinical studies, communicating interesting developments or stimulating a constructive scholarly debate. However, it also allows fake or biased information to spread widely and rapidly. News sites and blogs do not always respect the principles of fair journalism. On social media, where the dividing line between news and opinion is thin, the integrity of a researcher or institution can all too easily be called into question. Also see: [Intranet VUmc - Informatie - Social media](#)

Recommendations

Researchers should carefully consider their contribution to public statements before these are released.

The following guidelines will help researchers to avoid publicity pitfalls. Special attention is paid to publicity in which industry plays a role.

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1. Before scientists share their research outside scientific channels and/or have contact with the media (including social media) about this research, it is highly recommended that they consult with the Communication department of Amsterdam UMC, VU or UvA. The independent nature of research is then emphasized by the institutions' seal of approval. What's more, the experience of seasoned communication professionals can be a great support. Also see:
 - [Intranet VUmc - Persbeleid](#)
 - [Intranet VUmc - Mediarichtlijn](#)
2. Examples of potential conflict of interest related to cooperation with commercial parties are:
 - A symposium related to a thesis or major publication that is sponsored by and/or associated with publicity from a commercial party;
 - Sending out press releases in an attempt to speed up the registration of a drug or facilitate the listing of a biotech company on the stock market;
 - Lending equipment on the condition that favorable publicity is generated;
 - Organizing a sponsored meeting about a new treatment, product, drug or therapy for media with expert opinion leaders. In the case of government-commissioned research, researchers frequently find that a commissioning ministry or municipal authority want to arrange publicity themselves. The independent status of their institution enables researchers to resist pressure from external parties. Again, researchers are strongly advised to consult the Communication department and, at least, demand the right to see and approve press releases before they are issued.
 - Also see: [AMC Intranet - Nevenwerkzaamheden](#)
3. To avoid a potential conflict of interest, researchers are advised not to feature in media productions created by a company.
4. Openness regarding the funding of research is inherent to research integrity. Transparency prevents suspicion of conflict of interest. It is mandatory to acknowledge the important contribution of charities or other funding bodies.
5. Popularizing research results and raising expectations can involve risks. The media almost always gauge the importance of basic research in terms of potential clinical applications. If researchers allow themselves be led by exciting theoretical vistas rather than the precise significance of their findings, they may raise hopes of 'medical breakthroughs' that later fail to eventuate. When patients' expectations cannot be met, this understandably leads to disappointment or even anger. Clarity is also needed regarding patients' access to a new test or drug.
6. Caution is needed when interim findings point to a successful outcome. The researcher may be tempted to release results prematurely to secure funding for follow-up research.
7. Researchers are advised to take the initiative when they expect media to be interested in their findings. An effective approach is to issue a press release or a statement via social media. This must be done with the permission and support of the Communication department.
8. Publicity about a study is most undesirable when a manuscript about that study has been submitted to a scientific journal but not yet published. Top journals, in particular, have strict rules in this respect, with sanctions that can include refusal to publish the article. Journals' regulations regarding the presentation of research at conferences or participation in promotional ceremonies prior to publication are not always clear. Again, the Communication department may be helpful.

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9. When using a press release or advertisement to recruit trial subjects, take care to describe the trial conditions accurately. Transparency and accuracy are critical when it comes to describing the potential effects of the drug, especially in trials involving patients. Potential participants must be informed about possible side effects and uncomfortable tests, as well as the likelihood of being assigned to a placebo group. The information given must correspond completely with the research protocol. In the case of multicentre trials not coordinated by the institution, the researcher is still responsible for what is asked from their patients. The medical research ethics committee must review and approve the text before it is used.

10. Publishing in commercial media, such as editorials funded by pharmaceutical companies, is prohibited. These publications may not fall under the responsibility of the editor-in-chief and can be considered as advertisements.

11. In order to increase the dissemination of APH research in the media the communication channels of Amsterdam Public Health are recommended to be used. These communication channels include the research website of the institute, monthly newsletter and social media channels including LinkedIn and Twitter. For APH specific communication contact: GeertjeMarije Takkenberg g.m.takkenberg@amsterdamumc.nl

Support

Communication department

Location AMC: [Intranet AMC - Dienst Communicatie](#)

Location VUmc: [Intranet VUmc - Dienst Communicatie](#)

VU: Website VU - [Communicatie & Marketing](#)

UvA: [Website UvA - Dienst Communicatie](#)

LINKS

	Link
Amsterdam research Code - chapter 10	https://www.amsterdamumc.org/research/integrity.htm
Dienst communicatie AMC	https://intranet.amc.nl/web/organisatie/clusters/afdelingsoverzicht/dienst-communicatie.htm
Dienst communicatie VUmc	https://intranet.vumc.nl/afdelingen-themas-1/dienst-communicatie.htm
Persbeleid VUmc	https://intranet.vumc.nl/afdelingen-themas-1/dienst-communicatie/dienst-communicatie/persbeleid.htm
Mediarichtlijn VUmc	https://intranet.vumc.nl/afdelingen-themas-1/dienst-communicatie/dienst-communicatie/persbeleid/mediarichtlijn.htm
Informatie - Social media	https://intranet.vumc.nl/afdelingen-themas-1/patientgericht-verbeteren/patientniveau/informatie-voor-de-patient/informatie-social-media.htm
AMC Richtlijn nevenwerkzaamheden	https://intranet.amc.nl/web/personeel/homepagina-hr/rechten-en-plichten-1/nevenwerkzaamheden.htm
Dienst communicatie VU	https://www.vu.nl/nl/over-de-vu/contact-routebeschrijving/adressen-en-telefoonnummers/dienst-communicatie/index.aspx
Dienst communicatie UvA	https://www.uva.nl/nieuws-agenda/persvoorlichting/contact-persvoorlichting/contact-persvoorlichting.html

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DOCUMENT APPROVAL

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