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*Strengthening Organizations, Strengthening Communities*

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES**

Recruiting members and public relations are both intangible subjects to discuss, but I will try to share some ideas that have helped the Michigan Meniere's Support Group to grow and grow. In this group, we are all fighting the same battle to help doctors, nurses and professionals know what Meniere's and Dizzy Disorders can do to your life. We need to educate people and by being bonded together, we are making inroads. People are beginning to at least recognize the word Meniere's. I explain the symptoms to almost everyone I meet...in other words, being an extrovert and describing it in detail! Then before you know it, they have a sister, cousin, or someone who is suffering, and want me to phone that person.

### **PEOPLE . . .**

It's important to get others to feel a bond toward your endeavor personally. The four ingredients of good PR are People, Salesmanship, Attention and Ingenuity. Every activity our group has is a potential news story. If there is a picnic or some type of party, this can be treated as a special event in the news.

Also, always mark your calendars to remind you of when to submit releases. The press needs a two week notice. You can sometimes get your release in later, but don't push your luck by pressing the person at the news desk, and get a bad reputation for late submissions.

### **SALESMANSHIP . . .**

Make a list of newspapers, TV and radio and make friends with the person who is going to handle your group's activities. Phone each newspaper and ask who would be best to help you with this endeavor. Ask for a few minutes of their time, in person, to tell your story, but let them set the date and time.

### **ATTENTION . . .**

Pay attention to all the small pamphlets that come to your home. Once I happened to notice a flyer addressed to my husband from an insurance company. On the back of the flyer it mentioned a support group meeting at a local hospital. My first thought was, "Would they place our group meeting in their flyer too?" I phoned the public relations department of the insurance company and got the details. Then I noted the submission date on my calendar and when the time came, forwarded our meeting information to their attention. This one little flyer reaches 100,000 subscribers.

### **INGENUITY . . .**

Be on the lookout for unique ways of opening your articles. The Van Gogh enlightenment that he did not suffer from insanity when he cut off his ear, but hoped to rid himself of the terrible disease of Meniere's was authored by Dr. Kaufman Arensberg. This brought many phone calls to my home, asking if I would mind having my picture taken as they understood that I am suffering the same disease as Van Gogh the great artist. Of course I said "Yes!" I also use business cards and hand them out to whomever seems interested. I belong to Toastmasters and may start a conversation talking about my concern that when I am giving a speech I know that any minute I could go into a tilt-a-wheel spin. This draws interest and spreads the word.

## GETTING MEDIA ATTENTION . . .

- **Do** watch your newspapers for articles about support organizations to better understand the kind of events covered and how they are written.
- **Do** tune in TV and radio news programs frequently to learn how they handle support organization publicity.
- **Do** treat contacts as busy, hard-working professionals. Determine what they look for in a news release. Provide information that is really news, although sometimes routine news may be picked up in a monthly calendar of events.
- **Do** accept the likelihood that you will "win some, lose some," and be grateful for those you win.
- **Do** encourage your members to come up with original ideas for support activities which would be worth publicizing.
- **Don't** ask your newspaper contact for a clipping or a copy of the paper in which your publicity appeared. Buy your own newspapers.
- **Don't** complain if your release is re-worked or even totally rewritten, unless facts have been significantly altered. Be grateful for the free publicity you receive.
- **Don't** make a point of telling one media contact that another has used your publicity. You could make the situation permanent.
- **Don't** fret about publicity that didn't jell. Focus on the future.

*Used with permission from Marie Key with the Michigan Self-Help Clearinghouse.*