Unit 13

Interviewing & Media Tips

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| Overview  In this unit, trainees will participate in a mock interview and then analyze how their responses could get distorted or misinterpreted. This unit gives trainees the chance to experience situations similar to those they might face when speaking publicly about HIV vaccine research and emphasizes the importance of being able to communicate in a clear, consistent manner and to avoid making statements that could be distorted.  Objectives  By the end of the unit trainees will be able to:   * Give clear, accurate, consistent responses when dealing with the media * Understand the *dos* and *don’ts* of working with the media   Materials   * MediaMatters.ppt – 1 copy per trainee * Mock Interview questions.doc – 1 copy per trainee * Media Tips for Staff.doc– 1 copy per trainee   Approximate time  2 hours, 30 minutes |

# Warm-up/Introduction (15 minutes)

## Trainer notes

This training focuses on preparing trainees to work with the media and to respond to interview questions. The media can either be helpful by disseminating your message correctly, or damaging by perpetuating misconceptions and creating mistrust. This exercise shows how words can be misunderstood and misused by the media, and also how people can be misquoted.

## Preparation

Local Newspaper Name





Obtain a copy of the local newspaper in advance. Cut out a large square underneath the newspaper’s name making sure to cut out the headline. Tape the newspaper to a flipchart sheet, using the cut-out square to write the new headline created during the trainee’s interview. Set aside.

## Procedure

**Step 1:** You will act like a reporter for the local newspaper doing a story on HIV vaccine trials in the local community. Explain that each trainee will get a chance to be interviewed by the trainer by the end of this lesson.

**Step 2:** Ask for a volunteer. If there are no volunteers, pick someone.

**Step 3:** Start the mock interview with: *“Hello, my name is (insert your full name) and I work for (insert the name of a local newspaper in the community). I understand that you are an expert on HIV vaccine trials. Could you please answer some questions for tomorrow’s article on vaccines?* (Wait for response) Thanks. *Are these vaccines safe?”*

**Step 4:** Allow the participant to answer. If his/her answer is short, encourage a longer response or reword the question so as to continue the dialogue. You should be taking notes during this interview and try to capture at least a partial quote of an incorrect statement (example shown below).

**Step 5:** Once you finish the interview (which should take no longer than a minute or two), quickly think of an inflammatory headline that could be published using the information that was given during the interview.

Local Newspaper Name

**HIV Vaccines Safe: No possible side effects for research participants**

**According to HIV vaccine expert (*insert name*), “…there is absolutely no way that a volunteer can get sick through a vaccine trial.”**



**Step 6:** Turn the flipchart paper so no one can see it, and write in the inflammatory headline. Once the headline has been completed, turn the flipchart around for all to see and have someone read the headline.

**Step 7:** Following the headline, add a quote or something close to what the trainee said during the interview that could be misinterpreted by the media or by people who know very little about HIV vaccine trials and research (see diagram on the right).

For example, if the trainee says that there are no possible risks associated with trial participation, a potential headline could read, *“HIV Vaccines Safe: No possible side effects for research participants.”* This is incorrect. While the vaccine cannot cause HIV infection, there may be various side effects to trial participation (i.e., sore arm, fever, social harms, unknown side effects, etc.).

**Step 8:** Explain that even if something is told to the media correctly, it may not be printed accurately. For example, it is true that a trial volunteer may test antibody positive for HIV after receiving an active vaccine product. However, this is different from actually being HIV-infected. Such a misunderstanding can cause major problems when dealing with poorly informed members of the media. Additionally, headlines are written to sell papers or to get people to click on an internet post. In many cases, the person who writes the headlines is not the same person as the interviewer who writes the story.

# Presentation of Information (30 minutes)

## Preparation

* MediaMatters.ppt

## Procedure

**Step 1:** Explain that what they witnessed was an example of what can happen when working with the media, and that this can easily happen if you’re not careful about choosing your words when speaking to the media. The mock interview was to show the importance of being properly prepared to work with the media and when speaking publically about HIV vaccine research. Explain that in the short presentation to follow, they will be given specific strategies to help them work effectively with the local media.

**Step 2:** Present PowerPoint slides reading the speaker’s notes and stopping for questions as they arise.

# Group work (1 hour, 30 minutes)

## Preparation

* Mock Interview Questions.doc This document contains 9 different interview questions. You may need to may two sets of copies depending on the number of trainees.
* Media Tips for staff.doc

## Procedure

**Step 1:** Tell participants that they will now have a chance to practice interview questions that they might be asked by reporters or by members of the general public. Trainees will each be given a question to which they will need to prepare a response. Each participant should work with a partner, but make it clear that each person will receive their own scenario and will be giving their own interview (as they saw in the warm-up exercise).

**Step 2:** Distribute *Mock Interview Questions* giving one question to each trainee. Keep a copy of each question for you touse as a guide when playing the newspaper reporter.

**Step 3:** Point out that each handout contains a different example of how the media could distort someone’s answer to the question given as well as a short explanation of the technique the reporter used to distort the interviewee’s words, often using a quote.

**Step 4:** Give trainees **15 minutes** to prepare their responses to their interview question and encourage them to practice speaking their answer aloud to their partner. Explain that after each person’s mock interview, the group will have time to collectively discuss that person’s response, and make suggestions about how responses to any of the questions could be improved in the future.

**Step 5:** Next, you will act as the newspaper reporter and try to get each person to give inaccurate or off-message responses in a mock interview setting. After each participant gives his or her prepared response, ask follow-up questions or make comments that might make the interviewee give an answer that could be distorted or that contradicts one of the recommendations given in the lecture.

**Step 6:** After each mock interview ends, try to come up with an inflammatory headline on a flipchart sheet including an exact quote taken from the interview to elaborate on the headline.

**Step 7:** At the end of each mock interview, spend a few minutes talking with the entire group about what that person did well and what he or she might do differently in the future if they were interviewed by a reporter.

**Step 8:** Talk about how you hope that the exercise has helped them to get an idea of how certain statements can be interpreted by the media. For this reason, it is important that not everyone speak to the media about HIV vaccines, but instead the site should have designated spokespersons, typically the Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-PI.

Remind the group that some sites have Media Relations and/or Communications staff that would be responsible for working with the media and developing media plans. It is important to understand how your clinic staff should work with these other departments. Sometimes it is necessary to do some education for these departments, so that they are better able to support your efforts.

**Step 9:** Ask each trainee to describe the media/communications structure at their site and/or institution.

**Step 10:** If trainees are ever in a position in which they do have to deal with media, this handout provides some useful tips. Distribute *MediaTipsForStaff* handout. Have a trainee read the handout out loud to the rest of the group.

# Wrap-up Activities (5 minutes)

## Trainer notes

You will know that the trainees have understood this unit because they will be able to create responses to the mock interview questions that are clear, consistent, and accurate. Moreover, their responses will reflect an understanding of the content of the lecture as well as of the handout *MediaTipsForStaff*.

Some specific evidence of trainees’ understanding will include:

* Giving direct, concise, accurate responses to questions
* Being able to back statements with good examples or statistics
* Not getting upset by difficult or even rude questions or statements
* Being able to give responses that put HIV research, the CAB, etc. in a positive light
* Being able to stay on message throughout the mock interview

## Procedure

**Step 1:** In the time remaining, ask the group for some specific examples locally where the media distorted a story in the community causing some type of rumor, myth or misconception. Try to begin a discussion around various reasons their local media may use information in certain ways (e.g. politics).

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| Additional resources   * Communications Handbook for Clinical Trials, 2009. By Elizabeth T. Robinson, Deborah Baron, Lori L. Heise, Jill Moffett and Sarah V. Harlan. Preface by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Available for free through www.FHI360.org |

The HIV Vaccine Trials Network is supported through a cooperative agreement with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases