

Dos and Don'ts of Media Relations for PAs During COVID-19 Response

As a PA on the front lines of the response to COVID-19, you may be approached by media who are looking to healthcare providers for insight into what is happening on the ground. Sharing your experience is essential to ensuring the public gets the facts. Here are things to keep in mind before you speak with the press and/or engage in social media.

DOs

- DO get permission from your employer before agreeing to talk to the media. Be sure you follow your employer guidelines.
- DO be honest about your experience but strive to be calm, maintain professional poise, and instill confidence that healthcare providers are working together for their patients. Remember that the public is looking to you for assurance and guidance.
- DO use your influence to re-enforce official recommendations such as social distancing, hand washing, and staying home as much as possible.
- DO use media interactions as an opportunity to remind the public that healthcare providers need to be protected too. You are working to protect the public; they should stay home to protect you.
- DO ensure anything you post on your personal social media is consistent with the above recommendations.
- DO contact media@aapa.org if you have any questions about how to handle a reporter's questions and need our support.
- DO understand journalistic terms before speaking to a reporter and establish the ground rules for your interview before agreeing to provide comments.
 - *On the record:* The reporter has your permission to attribute anything you say in direct or indirect quotes. Your full name, title, and place of employment will also be included in the article.
 - *On background:* The reporter can use the information you give them but does not have your permission to name or quote you directly. They can quote you indirectly, i.e. "According to a PA at..."
 - *Off the record:* The reporter is not allowed to use the information you provide with your name attributed to it. *Please note that saying something is "off the record" is not guaranteed protection that the information you share will not be used by the reporter, as many reporters tend to utilize "off the record" statements as "on background" information. AAPA advises you to avoid speaking "off the record" and rather respond by saying "I don't have that information" to any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.*

DON'TS

- DON'T share information on social media that you would not feel comfortable seeing attributed to you in news coverage. As a PA, you are a public figure, and the news media can treat your comments on social media as "fair game."
- DON'T agree to speak to a reporter if you do not feel comfortable answering questions.
- DON'T say anything you wouldn't want your employer to read or hear.
- DON'T speculate on anything related to this situation including how much longer the pandemic will last or looming problems for the healthcare industry. Stick to the facts on what is happening now and what your role is. Being honest about the current challenges you are facing is important, but do not allow the reporter to steer you into offering your personal predictions of future worst-case scenarios.