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Organisation: LGC Group
Is this input submitted as an organisational or individual response? Individual
Are you happy for your response to be published by the Academy? Yes

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Roles and responsibilities

1. What can scientists do to ensure their work is communicated accurately when working with you on press-released research?

2. What is the role of journalists in communicating the benefits or harms of medicines, and how much responsibility should they take? How does the pace of journalism affect this?

In most cases I'm sure they can only report what we tell them – they're not necessarily the experts in what is often a niche field and some info can possibly be understood more than one way. The pace of journalism certainly doesn't help for considered, scientific explanation – but that should not stop them checking for accuracy/asking for clarification. That said, with more and more journalism being based online, hyperlinks to original releases/reports/websites could be used much more widely.

3. What is the role of press officers in communicating science to the public via the media, and how much responsibility should they take for accuracy of articles that originate from press-released research?

It's hard for press officers to take full responsibility as they lose control of any nuances of the message as soon as it is given to the journalist. However, care can also be taken in distributing news to outlets that are less likely to misunderstand or wilfully misinterpret.

That said, with more and more journalism being based online (or expanded versions of printed articles appearing online), hyperlinks to original releases/reports/websites could be used much more widely. If a press officer finds that the release in the info is not explained fully/correctly then they should ensure that clarification is posted online and ask the journalist to link to it as a minimum. More flexible use of the 'web' – it is a web, after all, not a linear construct – should be undertaken.

4. What is the relative importance of accuracy and newsworthiness when working with scientists on press releases?

5. Are you supported in your efforts to communicate the robustness of evidence – are appropriate guidelines available?

Evaluating and reporting evidence

6. What are the challenges of including sufficient clarity in press releases regarding:
- whether something is an association or a causative relationship?
- whether a study is, for example, an observational study or a randomised control trial?
- whether the main result being reported was the finding related to the original hypothesis or an incidental finding?

7. What in your opinion can be the effect of emphasising limitations and caveats in press releases?
Scientific accuracy is paramount from a scientist's point of view so caveats should be included. The impact may be dulled, however, from a story point of view. This can lead to a busy journalist not fully appreciating the potential impact of the story and it not being seen as fitting their punchy editorial. This is a bigger issue than press officer and journalist – it will take considerable work to lessen the need/thirst for sensational findings. There is a real risk of science being lost if a more 'clickbait' approach to online reporting develops.

8. Do you think journalists treat observational studies and randomised controlled trials differently, and do you approach press releases for each differently?

9. How important do you think absolute risk is when communicating risk, and do you always include it in press releases?

10. What do you think are the benefits and risks of publicising preliminary research (e.g. work in cells, before animal or human trials)?

11. What do you think are the benefits and risks of publicising unpublished science that's being presented at conferences?

12. What do you think are the benefits and risks of press releasing opinion pieces and editorials (rather than original research with new data) being published in journals?

<u>The process of communicating evidence</u>

13. What do you think are the challenges of communicating evidence through the research –> press release –> media process? Do you think there might be a better system; and if so what would it look like?

14. How much do the public understand about the way science works (the process of research and publication; different types of studies; etc.), and does it matter if they don't? Do you think press officers and journalists have any role in educating the public in interpreting the quality of evidence?

15. What are the challenges of working with scientists with opposing views, and how do you navigate working with scientists that may have views that might be seen as different from those of the mainstream scientific community?