

## **MEDIA BRIEFING NOTES**

Do appoint a designated spokesperson who will deal with the media but do keep your group in the loop, and do get people to help you!

### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

Check or ring your local papers, radio and TV, to find the most suitable person to send information to, if you don't already have a local contact. (Either draft your release before you speak to them, or have the key points to hand, so you can explain your story simply if you need to discuss who is the best contact). Some might have a health correspondent, otherwise information should usually be sent to the news editor or forward features/diary desk for local TV. Get email addresses, so that you can send the release both as printed 'hard copy' and electronically. And remember to get the **deadline date** – the date you need to send information in to ensure it appears at the right time.

Here are some websites that might also be helpful:

Local press: [www.newspapersoc.org.uk](http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk)

Local radio: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/england/radindex.shtml> and [www.radio-now.co.uk/main.htm](http://www.radio-now.co.uk/main.htm)

All media: [www.mediauk.com](http://www.mediauk.com)

### **PRESS RELEASES**

This is a key tool in media relations. The press release allows you to 'sell' your story to the media in a simple, straightforward way. Some tips for press releases are given below.

**A press release should (ideally!) be no longer than one or two pages of A4.**

If it does spill over on to a second page staple the pages together rather than use a paper clip, and ensure that your contact details are provided somewhere on each page. (Three pages of dense type will not be read!). If you do run over one page, make sure you number the pages.

**Releases are usually typed with a spacing of 1.5 lines in a clear font.**

This allows busy journalists to see the copy clearly and easily, and provides space for the journalists to make notes on the document itself. If it looks like you can get the information on one page if you use single spacing do so, as long as it is easy to read and doesn't look squashed on the page. The basic idea is to make it as user-friendly as possible.

**Send the release at least a week or ten days before you want the information published and be aware of newspaper deadlines.**

Regional press (which often cover a county) are daily publications with a daily deadline. Smaller, local papers usually published once a week and have a weekly deadline (for example, the Tuesday before they go to print and appear on

Thursday). If you are publicising an event, you may want to give the newspaper an even longer 'lead-in' time. If you do email them, send a hard copy as well.

**Always make sure you give contact details on each page of the release.**

**A press release is roughly comprised of three parts**

- 1 The HEADLINE: as short and snappy as possible, for example:**  
“MP Joins Bathshire M.E. Support Group to Celebrate M.E. Awareness Week”
  
- 2 The BODY COPY: This is the main part of the release**
  - The first line should hold the essence of the story; it should let the journalists have as many key facts as possible.
  - The first paragraph should contain all the key information.
  - Details should be expanded upon in the second and third paragraphs, which is often the place where you would add a quote from someone.
  
- 3 The final paragraph**
  - Reiterate the key points or sum the situation up in another quote.
  - The end of the release is clearly marked, followed by details of who and how to contact for further information. Sometimes you need to give some further background to the press release – but without taking up so much space the news or meat of the story is lost. This can be provided in the part called ‘Editor’s Notes’. An example is provided with these notes.

## **PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES**

**One way of enticing the press is to offer them an interesting photo opportunity.**

You may wish to use a local MP or celebrity, someone who has benefited or contributed to the development of the service, or an interesting location. If you are undertaking a photocall, the email should also be sent to the Picture Editor. Local radio will not be interested in a photocall but will be interested if this provides them with an opportunity to interview your 'celebrity' or spokesperson. Obviously, you must get his or her permission to make this offer. Details of interview opportunities can be added to the end of the release in bold type for emphasis.

## **RADIO and TV**

Local radio and TV often operate to shorter deadlines than the local press but the still need to be given ten days to a week advance notice of any event. Often, if you are trying to get publicity for an event, the best person to contact will be the radio news or diary editor and the TV diary editor, as well as any personal contacts you may have.

## **USING LOCAL CELEBRITIES**

Bear in mind that they might also want to distribute a press release, so liaise with them and get their permission if you are offering them for interview or for a photoshoot. And if you plan to use a quote from them in your press release, make sure you get their permission.

## **TAKING PHOTOS**

Do take your own photos of the event – preferably with a digital camera – so that you can send one to your media contact if they can't make it to the event. Remember to give any photos a caption – stating in one or two lines what the event is and detailing who is in the picture.

## **EVENTS**

You may want to send the release well in advance of the event and follow up the media ten days or so before (see **Follow Up**, below). You may also want to give journalists some additional material (see **Press Packs**, below). Make sure you have some information available at the event itself. Make a note of who attends the event – they could be useful future contacts – and thank them for coming.

## **PRESS PACKS**

In addition to your press release, you may want to include some information from AfME, or a map of your location, or a leaflet you have produced. It is a good idea to put these together in some kind of folder. Press packs can be used at events to make sure journalists have all the background information, or can be sent after initial press release follow up, see below.

## **FOLLOW UP**

**Don't be shy about following up your release – the media receive masses of press releases every day.**

To improve your chances of getting their attention it is a good idea to follow up the distribution of your press release with some telephone calls. It means that you can at least bring the release to someone's attention and verify that it has been received – or send it again if necessary. Some research indicates that effective follow-up can increase coverage by approximately 40%. With some things, such as events, you may need to follow up more than once to see if someone will be attending. Ring a few days to a week before your event to do a final check.

With local TV and radio, it is worth ringing up again the day before – their deadlines are daily and what they want to cover can change very quickly.

## **WHAT TO SAY**

**When following up a release, have it in front of you**, so that you can give the journalists the key points and the news 'angle' – the reason they may want to cover the story. After a story has appeared, you may want to thank the journalist

concerned – and it is a good way to develop further contact.

**FOR FUTURE REFERENCE, local papers like local stories:**

- About something new or interesting
- Which could have an impact on your life or that of the community
- Which involve a famous person
- Offering interviews and/or a photo opportunity for additional interest

And don't forget you can also get coverage through the **letters** section of local newspapers!

Local M.E. Groups Example Press Release 1 (Talk).

Please note that press releases should be sent out in sufficient time to give advance notice of an event. See media briefing notes for further details.

### **LOCAL GROUP FOCUS ON MEN AND M.E.**

As part of its celebration for M.E. Awareness Week, Bathaven local M.E. group will host a presentation entitled '**Men & M.E.**' at **Bathaven Town Hall, Address, on 12 May 2007 from X.00pm – X.00pm.**

Professor A. N. Expert will be the keynote speaker at an event designed to increase understanding about this chronic illness, which affects around 240,000 people in the UK, with up to a quarter of those so severely affected, they are house or bed-bound. An estimated X% of M.E. sufferers live in the S.E.\* The event will be chaired by XX, who is also the Chair of the Bathaven M.E. Group.

"This year we have linked with Action for M.E. – the UK's leading M.E. charity – who have developed a campaign looking at Men and M.E.", explains [spokesperson]. "While M.E. can affect anyone, of any nationality and at any age, by focusing on a particular group we hope to raise awareness of how this illness can impact on individuals. Men often face specific problems when dealing with health issues, and initial research seems to indicate that they may have more difficulty than women in getting diagnosed. Other research studies have also shown that the sooner the illness is diagnosed, the less severe its impact.

"Many people seem to think that M.E. is 'just' about feelings of fatigue but it can actually result in a huge range of symptoms from chronic pain to severe allergies, and the illness can last for years with some people literally becoming prisoners in their own home. We wanted to do something that would help the general public understand just how serious this chronic disease is, and the event is open to anyone who is interested in finding out more about M.E."

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\* See sheet regarding prevalence of M.E. by region

Bathaven M.E. Group was founded in 19xx to provide information and support for people with M.E. – and their carers – in the Bathaven area. The group holds regular meetings and if you are interested in finding out more, please see the contact details given below.

– Ends –

For further information, please contact: Name/landline/mobile/e-mail if possible

#### Editor's Notes

- 1 **Local Case studies can be provided.**
- 2 M.E. (myalgic encephalomyelitis/encephalopathy) is also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and is sometimes diagnosed as Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome.
- 3 The impact of M.E. is huge. The cost to the individual cannot be calculated but a previous study has indicated that the cost to the nation is approximately £6.4 billion per year.
- 4 A specially commissioned Ipsos MORI poll by Action for M.E. showed that over a third of the general public had never heard of M.E.; and the majority of those polled were unaware of the severe pain that the illness can produce.

Further information on M.E. can be found at the Action for M.E. website, on [www.afme.org.uk](http://www.afme.org.uk)

## Local M.E. Groups Example Press Release 2

### **Raising the Roof for M.E.**

Bathaven local M.E. support group have organised a sing-in to raise funds for Action for M.E. – the UK’s largest M.E. charity – during M.E. Awareness week, which runs from 8<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> May 2007. **The event will take place in X Church Hall, Address, on Saturday 9<sup>t</sup> May, from X.00 – X.00.**

This year, Action for M.E.’s campaign goes under the banner of ‘Men and M.E.’ Although M.E. can affect anyone, from any ethnic group and at any age, men often face specific problems when dealing with health issues, and initial research seems to indicate that they may have more difficulty than women in getting officially diagnosed. Other research studies have also shown that the sooner M.E. is diagnosed, the less severe its impact. By focusing on a particular group it is hoped to raise awareness of how this chronic and debilitating illness can impact on all those who have M.E.

“Many people seem to think that M.E. is ‘just’ about feelings of fatigue but it can actually result in a huge range of symptoms, from chronic pain to severe allergies”, explains [your spokesperson]. “It affects about 240,000 in the UK – X% in the SW\* – with a quarter of these severely affected. The illness can last for years, with some people literally becoming prisoners in their own home, being bed- or house-bound, and with some having to be tube-fed.”

Bathaven M.E. group will be singing songs from classic Hollywood Musicals during the ‘sing-in’. “We hope to generate both money and awareness”, adds [spokesperson], “and, of course, have a good time in the process!”

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– Ends –

For further information, please contact: Name/landline/mobile/e-mail if possible

#### Editor's Notes

- 1 Case studies of local people with M.E. can be provided.
- 2 M.E. (myalgic encephalomyelitis/encephalopathy) is also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and is sometimes diagnosed as Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome. It is estimated that almost a quarter of a million people in the UK have M.E.
- 3 The impact of M.E. is huge. The cost to the individual cannot be calculated but a previous study has indicated that the cost to the nation is approximately £6.4 billion per year. And it affects men, women and children
- 4 A specially-commissioned Ipsos MORI poll by Action for M.E. showed that over a third of the general public had never heard of M.E.; and the majority of those polled were unaware of the severe pain that the illness can produce.

Further information on M.E. can be found at the Action for M.E. website, on [www.afme.org.uk](http://www.afme.org.uk)

## PHOTOCALL

### **Local MP Joins Celebration of M.E. Awareness Week**

Hammerhead MP John Green has joined forces with a local Wykham M.E. support group to celebrate M.E. Awareness Week. He will be joining them at **[an event] on [date], [time]**. This year, the Wykham group are supporting the 'Men and M.E.' campaign established by Action for M.E. – the UK's leading M.E. charity.

"Many people seem to think that M.E. is 'just' about feelings of fatigue but it can actually result in a huge range of symptoms, from chronic pain to severe allergies", explains John Green. "It affects about 240,000 in the UK – X% in the SW\* (see prevalence sheet) – with a quarter of these severely affected. The illness can last for years, with some people literally becoming prisoners in their own home, being bed or house-bound, and with some having to be tube-fed."

Although M.E. can affect anyone, from any ethnic group and at any age, men often face specific problems when dealing with health issues, and initial research seems to indicate that they may have more difficulty than women in getting officially diagnosed. Other research studies have also shown that the sooner M.E. is diagnosed, the less severe its impact. By focusing on a particular group it is hoped to raise awareness of how this chronic and debilitating illness can impact on all those who have M.E.

**You are invited to a photocall with John Green MP and members of the Wykham M.E group at (location) time, date.**

– Ends –

For further information, please contact .....Name/landline/mobile/email if possible.

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\* See sheet regarding prevalence of M.E. by region

## Editor's Notes

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- 2 M.E. (myalgic encephalomyelitis/encephalopathy) is also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and is sometimes diagnosed as Post-Viral Fatigue Syndrome.
- 3 The impact of M.E. is huge. The cost to the individual cannot be calculated but a previous study has indicated that the cost to the nation is approximately £6.4 billion per year.
- 4 A specially-commissioned Ipsos MORI poll by Action for M.E. showed that over a third of the general public had never heard of M.E.; and the majority of those polled were unaware of the severe pain that the illness can produce.

Further information on M.E. can be found at the Action for M.E. website, on [www.afme.org.uk](http://www.afme.org.uk)

### Estimated prevalence of CFS/M.E. by region

Estimates of incidence are based on a research paper by Gallagher et al in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, December 2004. Please note that the M.E. Alliance believe that incidence is twice as high as the figures given here.

Region#	Population	PREVALENCE	INCIDENCE
North East	2,515,442	10,266	1,069
North West	6,729,764	27,465	2,861
Yorkshire and the Humber	4,964,983	20,263	2,111
East Midlands	4,172,174	17,027	1,774
West Midlands	5,267,308	21,497	2,239
East	5,388,140	21,990	2,291
London	7,172,091	29,271	3,049
South East	8,000,645	32,652	3,401
South West	4,928,434	20,114	2,095
Wales	2,903,085	11,848	1,234
Scotland*	5,062,011	20,659	2,152
Northern Ireland	1,702,628	6,949	724
		240,000	25,000

Notes:

1. Prevalence = How many people are estimated to have CFS/M.E.
2. Incidence = How many people are estimated to get CFS/M.E. per annum
3. See notes on page 2 for further information on the regions
4. The Medical Research Council has identified epidemiological research as a major deficit and a key subject for future research into CFS/M.E.
5. Pending such research the estimates of prevalence are based on existing sources i.e. research into prevalence in the USA, and the UK government estimate that the NHS should plan on the basis that 1 person in 250 is affected.
6. For the media we suggest simplifying the numbers, thus the North East would be "Over 1,000 people in the North East will get M.E. this year"

*Source: Mid 2003 Population Estimates, Office for National Statistics;  
General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency*  
\* 2001 census

**# Standard Regions:**

**South East:** Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire

**South West:** Bristol (and former County of Avon), Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Wiltshire

**North East:** Durham, Northumberland, Former County of Cleveland

**North West:** Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool, Greater Manchester

**Eastern:** Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk

**East Midlands:** Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire

**West Midlands:** Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Former County of West Midlands

**Yorkshire & The Humber:** Yorkshire (except for former county of Cleveland), Former South Humberside (North East Lincolnshire & North Lincolnshire Unitary Authorities)

**London:** City of London, and all London Boroughs

## **MEDIA CHECKLIST AT A GLANCE**

### **Make sure your press release:**

- Has an eye catching headline
- Has a short, crisp opening paragraph stating the significance of the announcement to the public or target audience
- Contains details of who is making the announcement
- Has one sentence and idea to a paragraph
- Has the most important information at the top
- Contains lively quotations to provide a sense of the colour and potential of the story
- Is addressed to the right person

### **Interview tips**

- Speak clearly and simply, one idea to a sentence
- Make 1-3 points ONLY, write them down before hand
- Avoid lots of numbers
- Be positive and enthusiastic, use gestures
- Keep your language simple, avoid jargon
- Give the name of your organization
- Practice beforehand
- Choose a visually interesting setting for TV interviews
- For TV, avoid sunglasses and stripes or distracting accessories
- Remember you are speaking to ordinary people, not experts