When a reporter calls

A primer on media relations
First things first...

- Before a reporter calls, be prepared by knowing your key messages. For AAPM, these include:
  - Current state of pain care in the US is fragmented and suboptimal
  - Ineffective pain care costs more than $100 billion annually
  - $61 billion in lost productivity time calculated for US businesses due to pain
Key messages, continued

☐ AAPM proposes a “population-based” model for treating pain; this includes setting up a recognized subspecialty for physicians who specialize in pain medicine

☐ AAPM speaks for those doctors who specialize in the treatment of pain
Key messages, continued

Demand for effective pain treatment is growing among U.S. patients:

- Approximately one out of two Americans is in pain
- One in four has persistent or chronic pain, the leading causes being headache pain, back pain and neck pain
Let’s get started

☐ You have “read and said” the key messages out loud and worded them in a way that is comfortable for you

☐ You have memorized the top three or four key messages

☐ At the actual interview, you have notes at the ready
Taking the call

☐ Unless it’s an on-camera interview, virtually all interviews will be via telephone

☐ The reporter will usually want you to talk to them right at the moment they reach you

☐ If it’s not a convenient time, say so, and inquire as to the reporter’s deadline for the story
Taking the call

- Set up a time that is convenient for you and respectful of the reporter’s deadline
- Ask about the story angle being pursued so that you can be prepared with the proper information
- Prior to the interview, write down some questions that might be asked, and prepare potential answers
Prior to the interview

- See if you can ascertain any “gotcha” motives on the part of the reporter; pain treatment can be controversial and the reporter might have an agenda they are trying to promote

- On the other hand, don’t be overly suspicious; just be prepared
The interview itself

- Know what you want to get across in the interview. Build a bridge of words from the reporter's question to your messages... and say them several times during the interview.

- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know the answer to a question but instead offer to find the answer and get back to the reporter before their deadline. Never respond to questions based on unfamiliar facts.

- Don't be rushed into answering. Don't feel obliged to fill "dead air" after a tricky question. Just pause, think... and then answer.
The interview, continued

- Avoid professional jargon; keep your messages as simple as possible, especially for consumer media
  - Project enthusiasm for your messages. That attitude is contagious. And if you're not excited about your message, the reporter and audience never will be.
Never say “no comment.” Instead, use bridging techniques to get the topic of conversation back around to your key points. Or, say, “I wish I had more information on that topic for you, but I don’t right now. I will let you know as soon as possible.” Then, be sure and follow up with the reporter.
The interview, continued

- “Stick to your knitting,” meaning if the interview seems to be heading in a direction you’re uncomfortable with, return to your key messages. Again, bridging is the technique that allows you to do this. Example:

- “I can’t answer that question, but what I can tell you is ...” and provide one of your key messages.
The interview, continued

☐ Silence is OK: When there is a pause in the interview, there is a natural inclination to want to fill up the empty space with words. Refrain from reacting, and simply wait for the next question. The reporter could still be writing down your earlier comments or phrasing his/her own next thought.
The interview, continued

☐ Remember that while the reporter will most likely be friendly to you, he or she is not your friend. They have a job to do, and so do you. Respond with warmth and regard, but always remember to “stick to your knitting!”

☐ Relative to the reporter and most of his audience, you are an expert. Be willing to comment on current issues; be a knowledgeable advocate for pain medicine
Always be thinking about what you would like the headline of the article -- or the "tease" of a broadcast story -- to say. Make those points two to four times -- more if possible -- during the interview. This improves the likelihood that the journalist will understand and report crucial information correctly.

Think "sound bite;" be concise. Except for feature or "profile" interviews, try to answer in 10-20 seconds for television and radio, 40 seconds for print. (Practice. It's tougher than you think.) For high-concern issues, the average television interview clip is eight seconds. That's three 12-word sentences!
The interview, continued

☐ Even if the answer is complex, **always find a way to simplify for a general audience**: Use anecdotes, analogies, metaphors, similes, short stories. But be brief.

☐ There is no such thing as “off the record.” Once you have uttered a sentence, those words are fair game for the reporter’s use.

☐ In other words, if you don't want to read it on the front page of tomorrow's paper, don't say it.
The interview, continued

☐ This should go without saying, but never lie or mislead the reporter; be scrupulously honest in all dealings with the media

☐ Decline to answer if necessary (offering a credible reason), but never misstate or intentionally mislead
The interview, continued

- **Ban negative words** -- not, never, no, none, nothing -- from your vocabulary. Discipline yourself to avoid negative prefixes: un-, dis-, im-, in-.

- **Never repeat negative statements** in answering a question, instead, turn them around and give a positive response.
The broadcast interview

Everything said up to now also applies to an interview that will be broadcast on TV or the Internet. There are, however, special concerns that must be kept in mind for these interviews.
The broadcast interview

- Remember the tip about not filling in the silence between questions? This applies doubly to broadcast interviews. Always assume the microphone and/or camera is on. One of the most “dangerous” times is actually after the camera or mic is turned off and you are walking the reporter to the door – stick to your knitting or make innocuous comments about the weather – don’t be caught adding ammunition for the reporter’s story
The broadcast interview

☐ If you are doing an on-camera interview, think about where you want to be taped. What is the appropriate background for the story – your office? A conference room? A busy hospital? Think through how the images would appear when setting up the time and place for the story
The broadcast interview

- Don't look into the camera. Instead, look at whoever is talking. Avoid the temptation to look at the monitor or acknowledge other distractions out of camera range. And remember: you are always potentially on camera, even if someone else is talking.

- If you are part of a multi-person interview or panel, remember that TV directors love “reaction shots” of your expression or body language.
The broadcast interview

- On TV, always dress your part, projecting a clean-cut, professional image
- For men: Avoid ties and jackets with distracting patterns
- For women: Avoid busy jewelry or anything that jangles or dangles
After the story appears

☐ It’s not necessary to contact the reporter and thank them for the story; this can actually be misconstrued as trying to curry favor

☐ If you are truly misquoted, contact the reporter first – don’t go over their head -- be polite but firm and ask for an opportunity to get the facts cleared up

☐ Unless the error is egregious, try and let it go; you can end up creating ill-will for your cause and continued negative coverage
To sum up

- Know your key messages
- Be prepared
- Never say “no comment”
- Always tell the truth
- Smile when talking
- “Stick to your knitting!”
In conclusion

- Media relations is not science; at its heart it is storytelling. Tell yours with truth and confidence!