

## Yamaguchi Medical Association External PR Activities

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It is generally internal communication that is important to an organization, but for an organization that conducts its activities primarily with respect to large numbers of the general public, it is also important to win their understanding and affinity.

With the expression “healthcare breakdown” in circulation these days, public awareness of the healthcare world seems to have shifted somewhat. This is likely due to the terrible current state of affairs, but change is also evident in the uniform antipathy that was formerly prevalent. Nevertheless, predicament is likewise opportunity. This should be precisely the time to heighten the public’s appreciation of conditions in the healthcare world and of medical association activities, and an occasion to win its affinity. It is this line of thought that informs the Yamaguchi Medical Association’s recent efforts in external PR activities, and we take pride in the results it has achieved. Below I discuss some of these activities.

Our past efforts in external PR have included such schemes as our website, public lectures for prefecture residents, telephone counseling programs and disseminating healthcare information, but it was questionable whether the information put out by the medical association was reaching the public with sufficient effect. Therefore, we looked at it from a different angle and shifted our stance to utilizing sources of information that are important for the public: television and newspapers. Our idea was not to buy advertising time in television broadcasts, supply programming, run newspaper advertising or make full-page print buys, but to work to have healthcare issues featured in more newspaper articles and to have



the medical association’s views included wherever possible.

One concrete result was a series on healthcare issues featured by the local television station’s news program. Others include television and newspaper coverage of events sponsored by the medical association and press conferences held to express medical association opinions. Meanwhile, one requirement of press coverage is the cooperation, to the extent possible, of healthcare institutions.

### Joint Projects on Healthcare Issues with Local Television Stations

Starting in December 2006, TBS affiliate TV Yamaguchi Broadcasting Systems 6:00 p.m. news program “Super news bureau” has broadcast a series of features on healthcare issues once or twice a month. The December and January 2007 broadcasts covered emergency pediatric care and the shortage of pediatricians, and February broadcasts covered cutbacks in long-term care. Programming proposals and planning are collaborations between the station’s news division and

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the prefectural medical association. The medical association provided as much cooperation as possible, analyzing healthcare issues for the press corps, making introductions for shooting locations and supplying information material, and the programs convey the medical association's views adequately. The result has been programming that the general public finds easy to understand and that adequately conveys the positions of the medical association.

Later broadcasts covered home medical care in March, female specialty outpatients in April, the shortage of nurses in May and lifestyle diseases in June. We worked to gain exposure for medical association activities, featuring the opening of the Yamaguchi city medical association's holiday/nighttime emergency clinic in the feature on emergency pediatric care, the prefectural medical association's general meeting on the formation of the women physicians participation promotional task force in the feature on female specialty outpatients, and the activities of the prefectural medical association's diabetes action committee in the feature on lifestyle diseases.

### **Appeals for Press Coverage of Medical Association Events**

We are requesting the prefectural government's press club to cover events held by the prefectural medical association. We produce concise, precise letters of request and distribute materials so as to facilitate understanding among journalists. With the TV program on "protective measures for persons suffering from pollen allergy" aired in December 2006 on the JMA telecourse "Fureai Kenko Network" sponsored and produced by the Medical Association, press outlets adopted the prefectural medical association's pollen information system, and four television stations covered the hay fever seminar offered in January as part of the public lecture series, and it also made the evening news. Two papers published articles on it the following day. Three television stations later broadcasted

special programming on pollen information.

### **Medical Association's Advocacy Activities by Press Conferences**

In November 2006 the Yamaguchi administrative evaluation office announced at a press conference the results of its survey of progress made on "issuing informative medical-fee receipts." All the newspapers ran articles on it, and these largely consisted of identifying "inadequacies at 20% of healthcare institutions" and "negligence" on the part of healthcare institutions. We therefore held a press conference at the prefectural government press club, where we described the actual state of affairs at healthcare institutions in the issue of receipts and commented on how the imposition of mandates would be problematic. This resulted in three newspapers running articles on the press conference the following day. Although articles ran in only three papers, they largely consisted of reporting the assertions of the prefectural medical association.

### **Need for Cooperation of Healthcare Institution with Medical Coverage**

While the medical association spared no effort in cooperating with the recent television coverage, individual healthcare institutions showed considerable resistance to news coverage. Even some healthcare institutions for which we made introductions with the assurance that they would consent to coverage in fact turned the press corps away at the gate. Journalists have for some time viewed healthcare institutions as closed off behind high walls, and it remains difficult to say that circumstances have been improving. There is not likely to be much cooperation between healthcare practitioners and the press until this problem of access is resolved. For this reason, the medical association will be requesting members to take a more flexible approach to accommodating press coverage.