

Defining my public communications goals

As a physician, you are an expert in medicine and patient care. Based upon your practice and specialty, you have a unique perspective on the most important health care issues of our time. If you are interested in engaging in public discourse, it's possible that you are motivated by a desire to educate patients, policymakers or other health care professionals. Or, perhaps you aspire to engage media or the public on issues that matter to your patients and your practice.

Whatever drives your interest in communicating in the public forum, you can define and achieve greater personal success when you set specific, achievable communications goals. This worksheet will help you determine the appropriate communications strategy for you and set attainable goals.

Think about each of the following questions and write your answers to each, knowing that you can revise them along the way. The more specific you can be in answering each question, the better.

1. Why do I want to speak publicly about health care issues? (Examples: to help patients in my community learn the benefits and key steps to achieve healthier living; to shape the public conversation about health care reform in my state; to establish myself as a well-informed thought-leader in my specialty.)
2. In the most specific terms possible, what group or groups of people do I want to reach, educate or influence? (Examples: adults in my community with high blood pressure; state or federal legislators; other physicians in my state or in my specialty. The "general public" is too broad of an audience, so break it down farther.)
3. What special expertise, singular perspective, unique experience or unusual viewpoint do I have that can help illuminate public discourse in the health care arena? (Examples: I am the only neurologist in my

region; I served on a statewide advisory committee about Medicaid reform; I have taught extensively in my specialty and am considered a national expert.)

4. In one sentence, what is the most important message I would like to convey to the audiences I want to reach?

Using the answers to the questions above, draft between one and three communications goals for yourself. These goals will direct the specific actions you will take as you engage in public discourse. As much as possible, define the specific outcome(s) you hope to achieve through your public communications.

These examples are models that you could follow in writing your goal(s) for participating in the public forum:

1. Because I am (name your singular expertise), I will speak out publicly to (list the audiences to reach) to change (state the public policy matter or the public/patient group health situation) so that it is (name the desired outcome) by (date, or other time factor for completion).
2. To establish my campaign to be elected to (name the society, association, board, political office), I will use public communications to persuade (define the individuals or groups of individuals) that I am qualified, so that they will (nominate or elect) me to (name the position) by (date of nomination, election or other time factor).
3. Because (health problem) is particularly severe among (name the people most affected) in (name your geographic region), I will speak publicly about (your most important area of expertise) to help reduce the incidence of (measurable health issue) by (amount) by (date).