BOOK AND MEDIA REVIEW

Handling the Media: Communication and Presentation Skills for Healthcare Professionals

John Illman. London, UK: JIC Books (www.jicmedia.org), 2016. ISBN-13: 978-0-993-51780-8. Price: £14.99. Pages: 184 (paperback)

How well do we know the media? Do you avoid talking with journalists or do you see how important journalists can be in promoting issues that relate to sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH). Many are wary of the press; having concerns about being misquoted, worries about issues being sensationalised, or fear of being made to look foolish. John Illman sympathises with this but makes the point that while this may be a risk, most reporters want to get things right and that "they are only as good as their sources". Illman is a media and presentation skills trainer and a communication consultant, author and broadcaster. He has over 30 years of experience as a national medical correspondent and health editor and was Chair of the Medical Journalists' Association for 6 years. Recognising the importance of good communication, he helped to pioneer Europe's first BA (Hons) Medical Journalism course for medical students. He is passionate about good communication and the important role the media has in communicating issues. He stresses the difference between information – 'giving out' versus communication, which is about 'getting through'. This book is all about 'getting through' and is written specifically for healthcare professionals, medical researchers, press officers, public relations practitioners and people working for medical charities.

This really is an excellent book, providing easy to read, well-crafted information presented with a logical flow. The 12 chapters are totally complementary and guide the reader through working with journalists – "knowing how they think and work should make you a better communicator". Outlining how the news business works – What makes news? How to prepare and respond appropriately to differing media interviews. Good, clear information is provided on making an impression, how to write effectively for the media and how to understand and use social media to best advantage. Illman provides numerous practical examples and pitfalls about working with the media – he discusses how to develop and present messages, the importance of 'keeping it simple', recognising that simple does not mean low quality. The golden rule running through the book is that when you have something to say, say it succinctly, get straight to the point and restrict yourself to three things if you want them remembered. Essential rules also include good preparation – "there is no such thing as a hard question if you have anticipated it and prepared a good answer", have a sound knowledge of your expert area, and speak only within your competencies.

Now more than ever is the time to work with the media to raise the profile of SRH to improve people's understanding of this important healthcare intervention. To support this, John Illman's book is the one book I most definitely recommend.

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