

Communicating Change

Demystifying Shifts in Public Health for Patients and Reporters

Presented by:

Allison Babka, public information officer (HCPH)

Dr. Stephen Feagins, medical director (HCPH)

Liz Bonis, health anchor/reporter (WKRC-TV)

Information That May Shift

Immunizations

Vaccine approvals, agency recommendations, scientific discoveries.

Emergencies

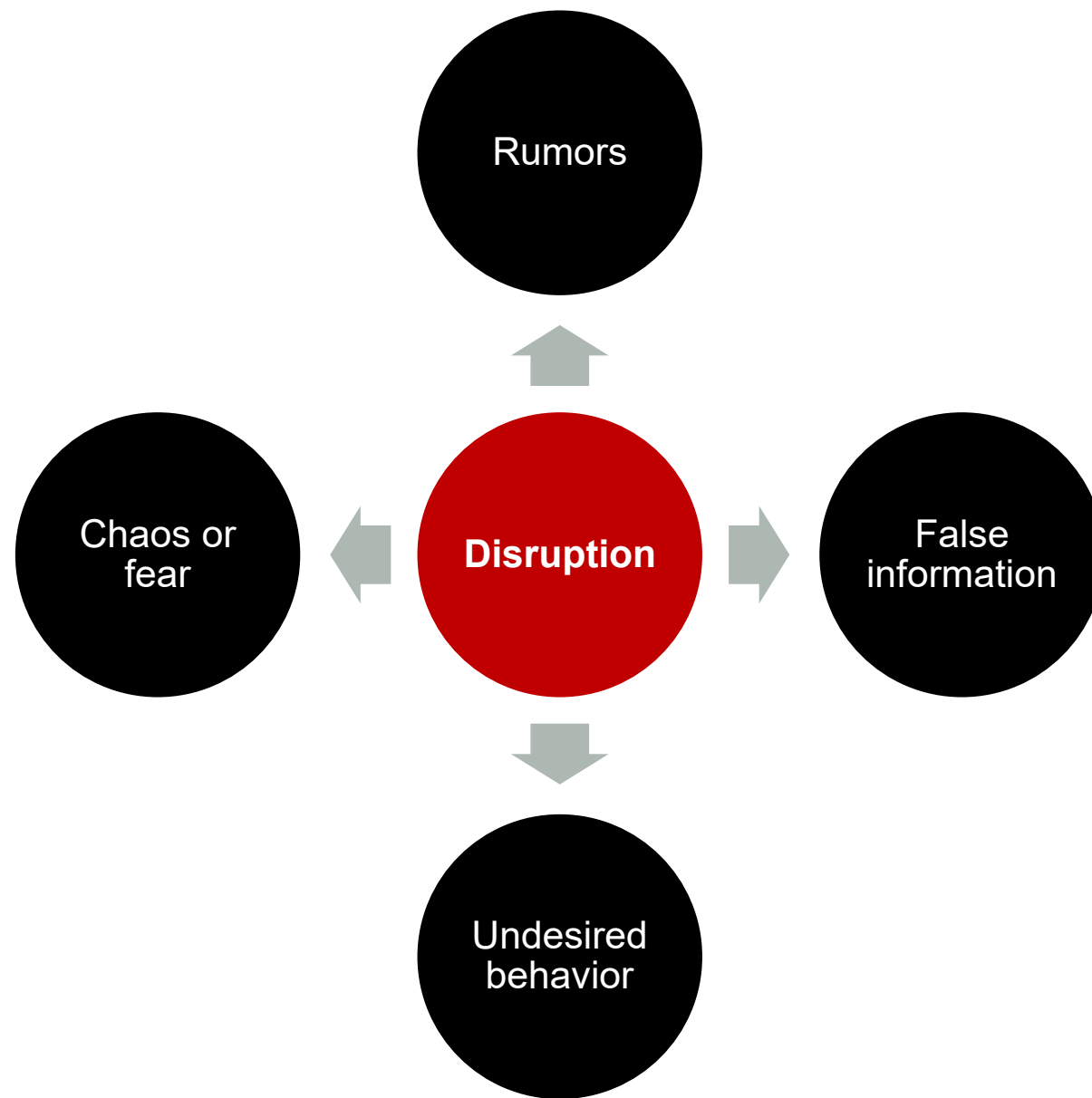
Local or national situations, evacuations, instructions.

Data Trends

Changes in local behavior, reports over time.

Regulations

Local/state/federal codes and guidance, hospital rules, legislative moves.



Disruption is inevitable.

But there's good news...

Vaccine Trust

People have a **great deal or fair amount** of trust in vaccine information from:

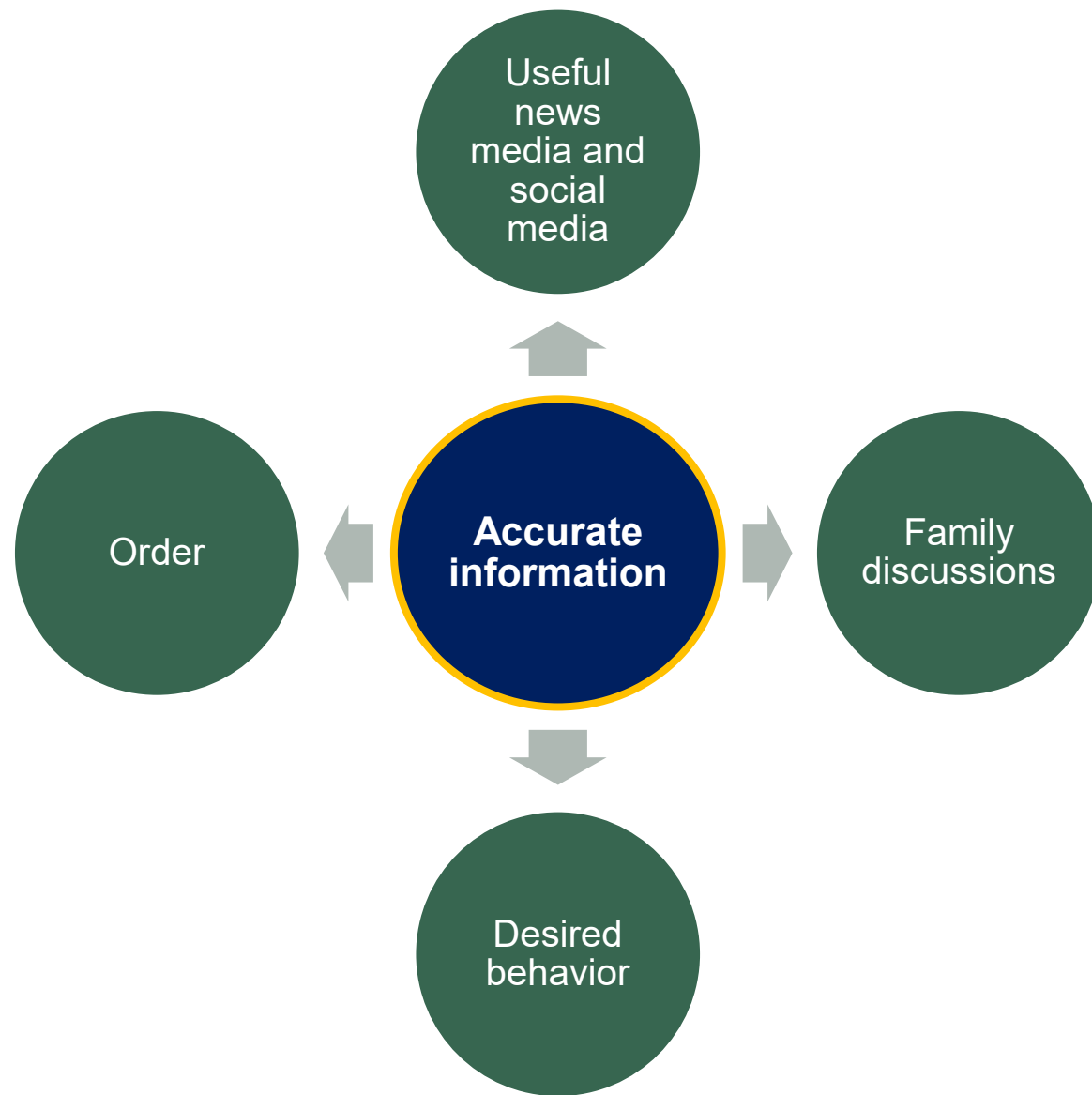
Their doctor or healthcare provider **83%**

Their local public health department **62%**

The CDC **57%**

Government officials **43%**

KFF Tracking Poll on Health Information and Trust (July 8-14, 2025)



Your Opportunity



You can turn public trust
into **meaningful
conversations** with
patients and reporters.

Section One: MOVING THE NEEDLE

What We'll Cover

Talking to Your Public Information Officer

Together, monitor national changes and determine language and strategies.

Talking to Your Patients

Anticipate their questions and proactively shift your language to spark discussions and build trust.

Talking to Reporters

Consider their need for national context at the local level and break down key ideas plainly.



Discussing Public Health Shifts

1. Internal

- Review hot topics.
- Discuss communication options.
- Solidify messaging.

2. Patients

- Anticipate their questions.
- Connect answers to their daily lives.
- Plant conversation seeds.

3. Media

- Consider the local impact.
- Be transparent.
- Explain ideas simply.

Ok, But How?

WIIFM

What's In It For Me?

WIIFM: What's In It For Me?

- **Consider your target's needs:** understand their motivations, deadlines, joys and concerns.
- **Answer “why” for them:** Why now? Why in this way? Why is this happening again?

Directly connect medical science and accurate information to what they're looking to do.

Why WIIFM Works



Anticipating someone's
needs **builds connection**
and **eliminates obstacles.**

Storytelling Is the Key.



Storytelling Techniques

- **Build connection:** tap into someone's values, emotions and important life moments.
- **Shift language:** move from broad impact to individual impact.
- **Be relatable:** share examples from your practice, the news or your life.
- **Be honest:** admit when you don't know something and learn together.

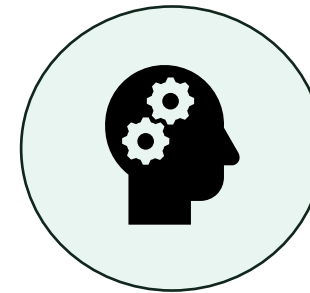
Ask the Medical Director



How have **WIIFM** and **storytelling** affected your patient conversations and behavior?

Section Two: CONVERSATIONS

Talking to Your PIO



First: Be in the Mix NOW

- **Have regular meetings with your PIO:** use monthly or weekly meetings to hone current communications, develop evergreen owned content and look ahead to future media pitches.
- **Develop a communications cadence:** be a reliable voice for public health.
- **Build trust before you need it:** talk to patients and media about routine public health tips and buzzy trends.
- **Easy pitches/content:** insect seasons, vaccine seasons, public health “holidays,” fact or fiction, holiday health tips, expert observations

Ask the Medical Director



What **benefits** have you seen after scheduling **regular meetings** with your PIO?

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Round Up the Gang!



Gather your **public information officer, health commissioner** and other messaging leaders.

Review Hot Topics

What's in the news?

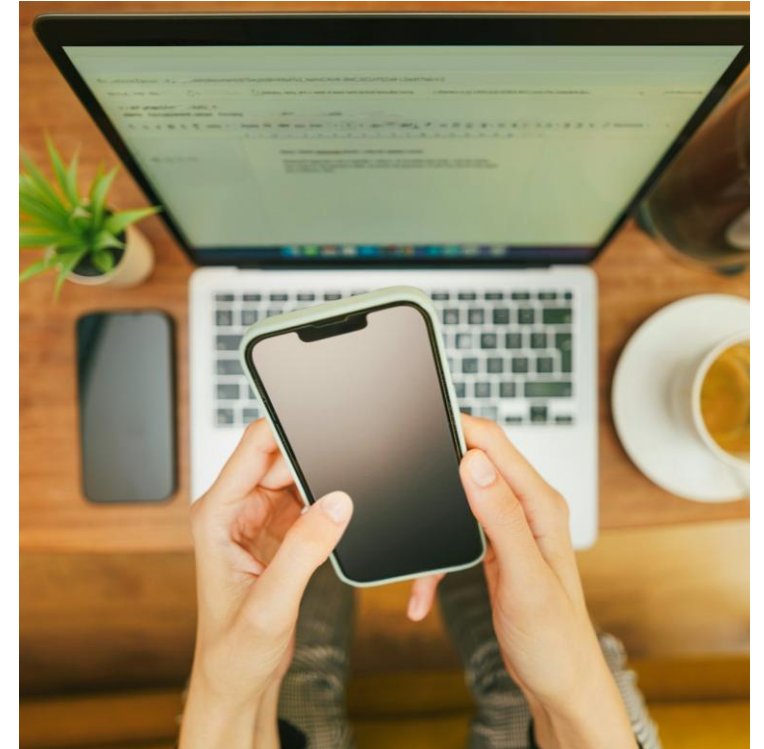
Monitor federal and state issues, look at the big headlines and assess potential local impact.

What's on social media?

Monitor different types of sources to get the pulse of what influencers are saying and users are sharing.

What perspective or reliability can you provide?

Determine if a voice like yours is missing and if can add context to key issues.



Discuss Communication Options



Will you proactively address an issue?

Decide which questions may have solid answers and which issues require more information before commenting. Consider your tolerance for being under the microscope if you lead.

Will you collaborate?

Consider if it's a good topic for a regional push.

Where can you influence discussion?

Assess your media relationships, your in-person conversations, and your owned digital or print properties.

Success Story - Measles

- HCPH monitored national measles outbreaks and **noted when measles came to Ohio.**
- Leaders discussed the likelihood of local outbreaks and **how to communicate severity** to residents.
- HCPH identified **key trends and talking points.**
- HCPH developed communications for **multiple audiences and channels:** physician toolkits, regional fact-sharing calls and emails, media outreach, website stories and social media posts.
- Hamilton County has had **no confirmed measles cases** thus far.

Regional Collaboration Helps



There's power in numbers.
Consider **aligning with
other local health
departments** to develop
shared communications on
big issues.

Ask the Medical Director



What **benefits** have you seen after **aligning with other health departments** on regional messaging?

Solidify Messaging

What are your key points?

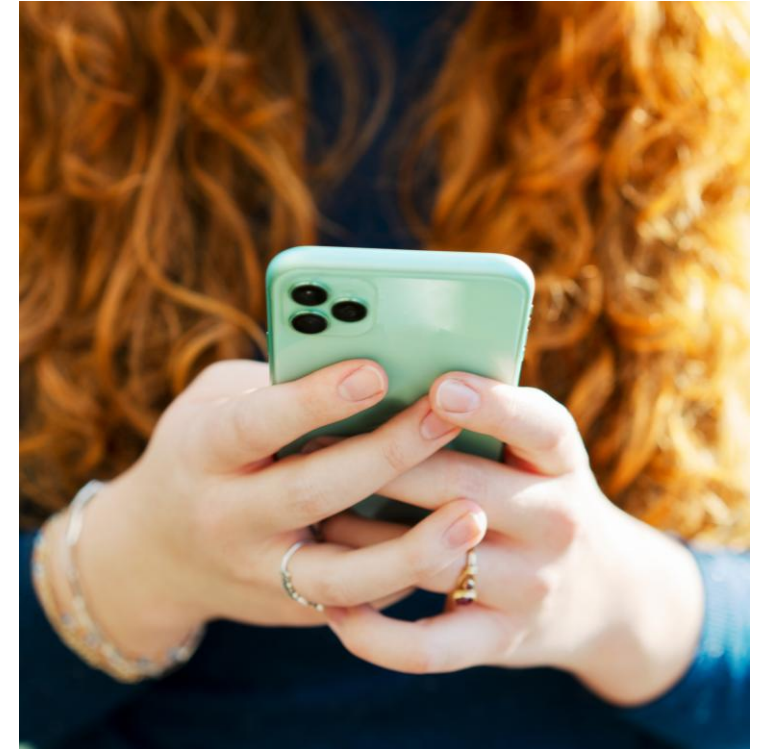
Consider your tolerance for being under the microscope.

What terms are you using or avoiding?

Develop your language framework that can welcome audiences and increase reception.

What are your key sources?

Assess the information sources you currently use and determine if you can or should lean on new ones.



Who Are Your Agency's Voices?

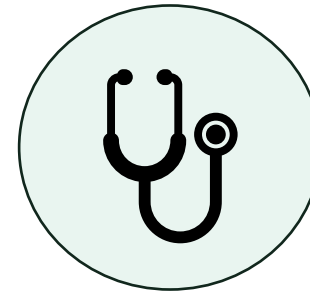


Probably **you**, as the **medical director!** Others may include the commissioner, PIO or division director.

Storytelling Opportunities

- Develop **lists of threes**: safety tips, things to know, ways to help.
- Consider teaming up with **trusted partner agencies** to find “It happened to me” folks for potential media pitches.
- Start finding **common ground and resonant language** for different audiences.

Talking to Patients



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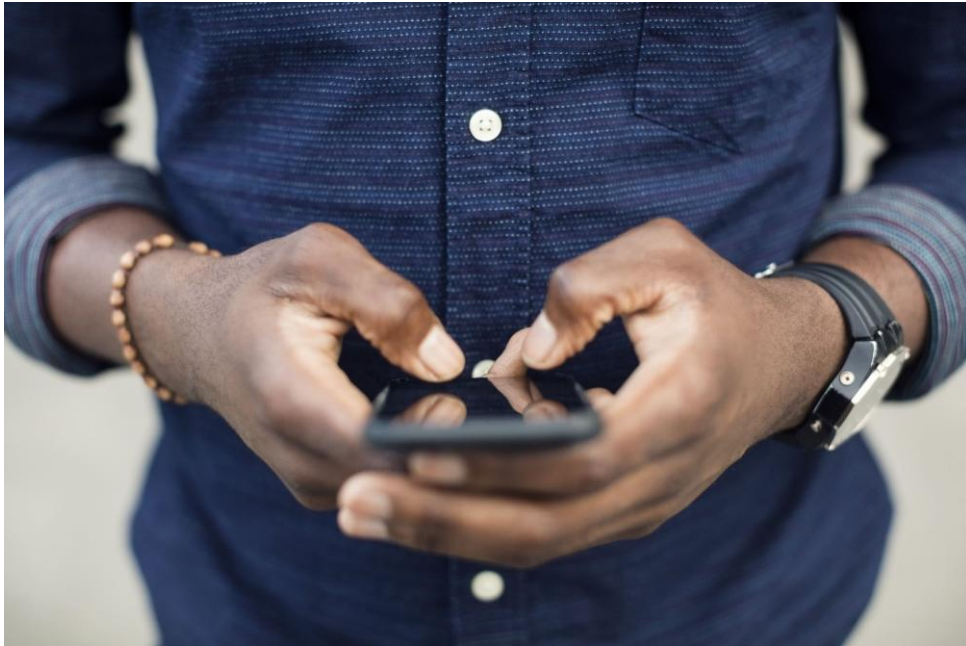
- Consider the local impact.
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Your Opportunity



You can turn public trust into **meaningful conversations** with patients and reporters.

Anticipate Their Questions



Where do they get information?

Social media platforms have become popular spaces for sharing both useful and harmful information.

What's their prior experience?

Consider their understanding of important health topics and if their position on something may have changed recently.

What's new, confusing or concerning?

Review recent studies that evolve previous information, consider scary terms and concepts, reflect on why they may be thinking about this new information.

Possible Vaccine Questions

Are vaccines safe?

Do you give immunizations or do I need to go somewhere else?

Can I just skip this one?

Why is your advice different from my favorite influencer's?

Will my insurance cover this?

Aren't vaccines being banned?

How much does it cost?

Have you gotten yours yet?

Why does my kid need this?

Should I get all of my shots at once?

What's in this?

Will this give me a disease?

Connect to Their Daily Lives

What do they want to do?

Consider their immediate needs like sports immunization requirements or not missing work. Connect good health practices to rewarding experiences like safely visiting with older relatives or traveling where there are certain requirements.

What obstacles can you remove?

Point them toward easy solutions like reviewing a treatment eligibility list for their condition or providing simple tips for post-emergency actions.

Rely on WIIFM.

Find out what they need and provide accurate, useful health information that can advance their goals.



Plant Conversation Seeds



Lean on empathy

Start from a positive position. Listen without judgement. Relate their concerns to situations or outcomes you've seen in your practice.

Ask questions

Gently dig deep to truly understand what they need in order to move forward. Be relatable when responding to their thoughts.

Offer to learn together

Reflect on their points and explore some sources they provide. Don't forget to follow up at a later date.

Finding Information

People researched **these topics on social media** in the past 30 days:

Weight loss, diet, nutrition

72%

Mental health

58%

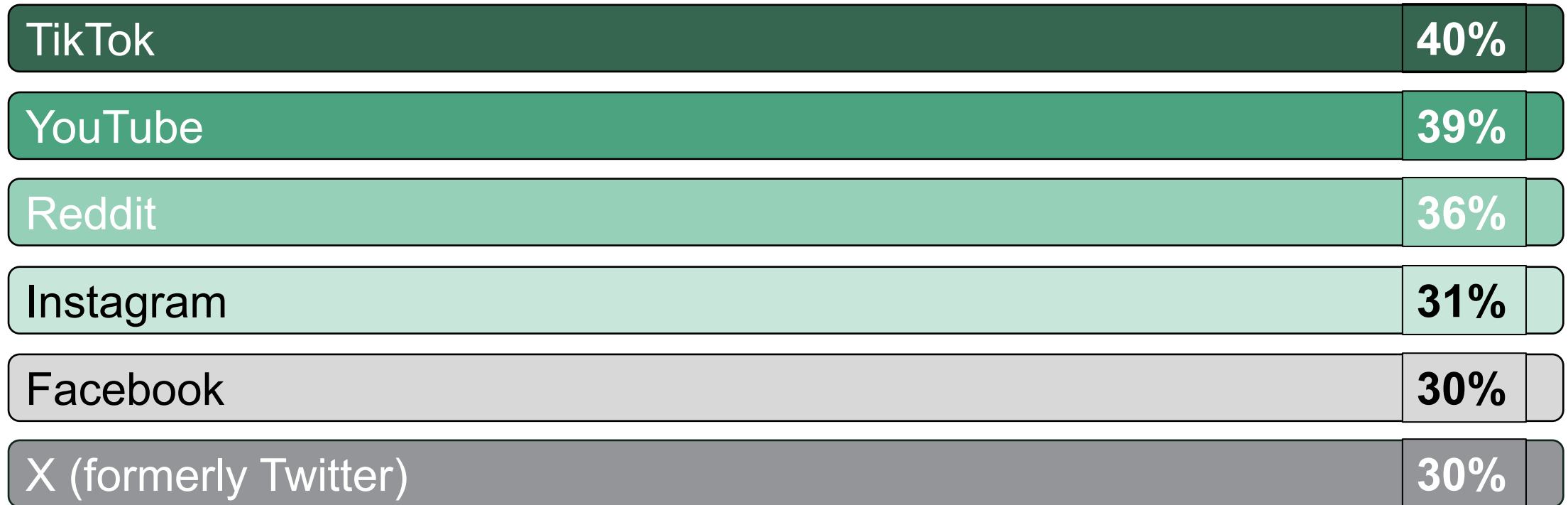
Vaccines

38%

KFF Tracking Poll on Health Information and Trust (July 8-14, 2025)

Finding Information

Young adults say they **trust most or some health information** on these platforms:



KFF Tracking Poll on Health Information and Trust (July 8-14, 2025)

**If your voice isn't out there,
someone else's is...**

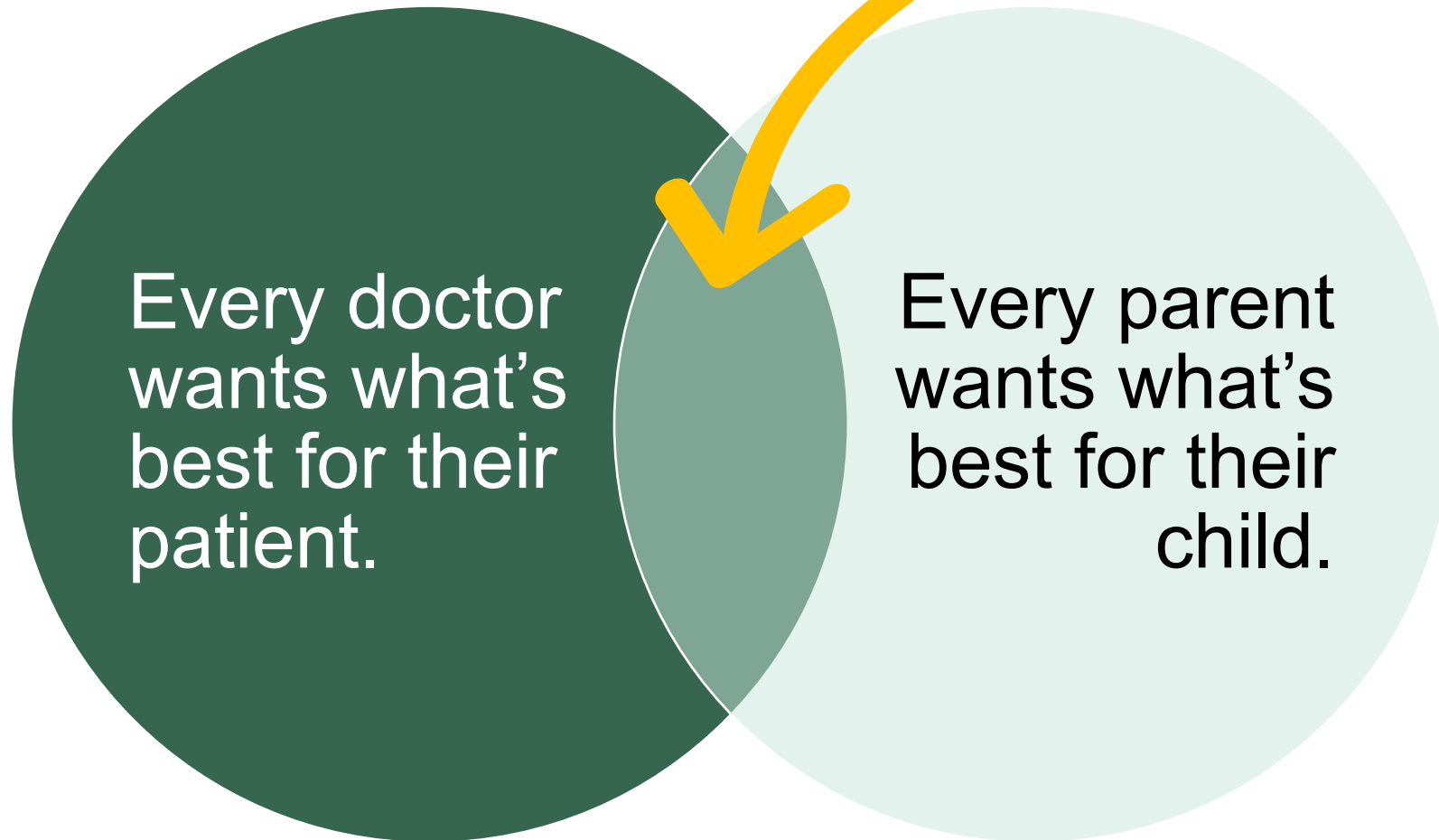
**...and theirs may not be
as helpful.**

Think Small, Not Big



People may be motivated by **individual wins**, not community wins. Bring things down to a **basic human level**.

Find the Center



Shift Your Language



Using **collaborative, conversational language** instead of expert language may **encourage a patient** to ask questions or seek resources.

You're already doing this.

Just turn up the volume.

Storytelling Opportunities

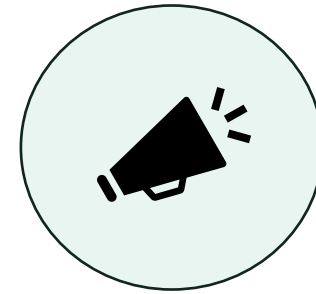
- **Relate to their experiences:** “Another patient just asked me that! Here’s what we found out.”
- **Focus on benefits:** “I know you’ll be traveling with the basketball team frequently, and this could help protect against all those people germs. My own granddaughter just finished her vaccine series for the same reason.”
- **Highlight positives:** “Yes, there are some changes to eligibility, but 3/4 people still have conditions that are covered.”
- **Avoid being a know-it-all:** “I was curious about that, too. Let’s look at what different sources say.”

Ask the Medical Director



What **changes** have you seen in patients when you use **relatable, intentional language and empathy**?

Talking to Reporters



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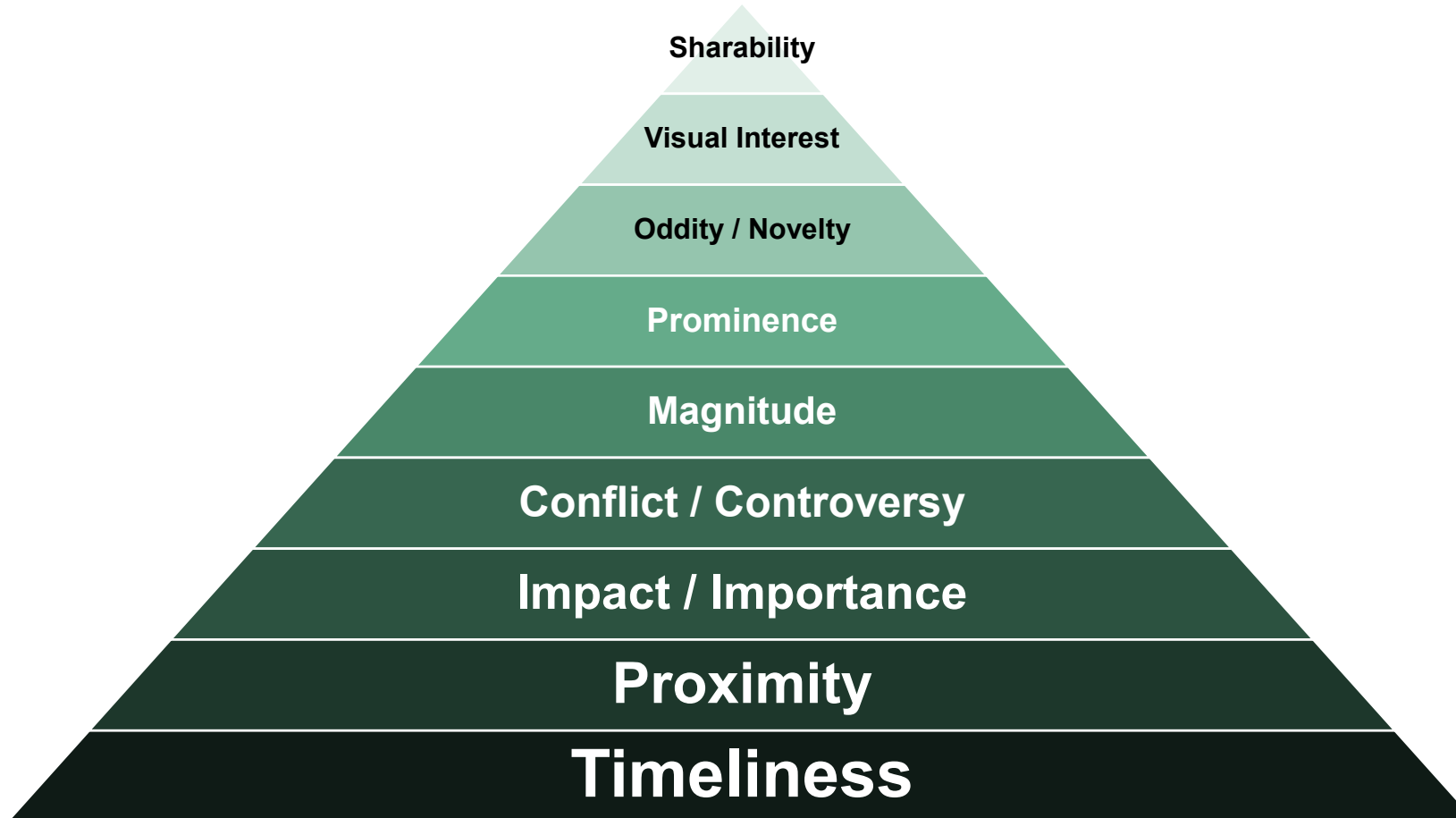
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What's Newsworthy?



Recent Newsworthy Public Health Topics

Timeliness

New vaccine approvals, back-to-school recommendations.

Proximity

Local grant funding denials, measles clusters.

Impact

COVID-19 pandemic, local emergencies, flu spikes/capacity numbers.

Conflict

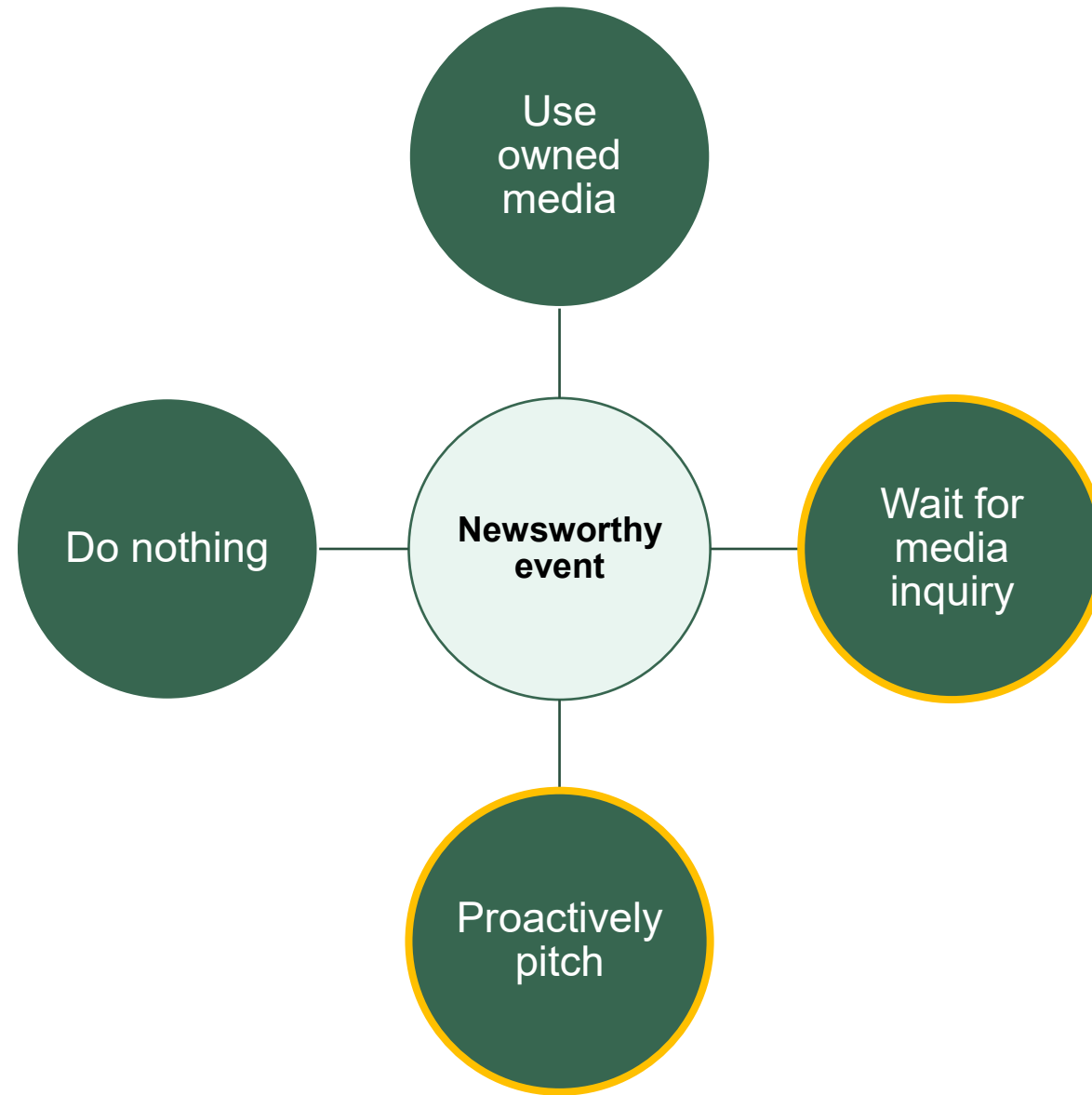
Differing opinion on vaccine safety, food coloring vs. cereal makers.

Localize It



Local reporters monitor national news for story ideas. You should, too.
Be prepared.

Media Response Options



Consider the Local Impact

What's your goal for the interview?

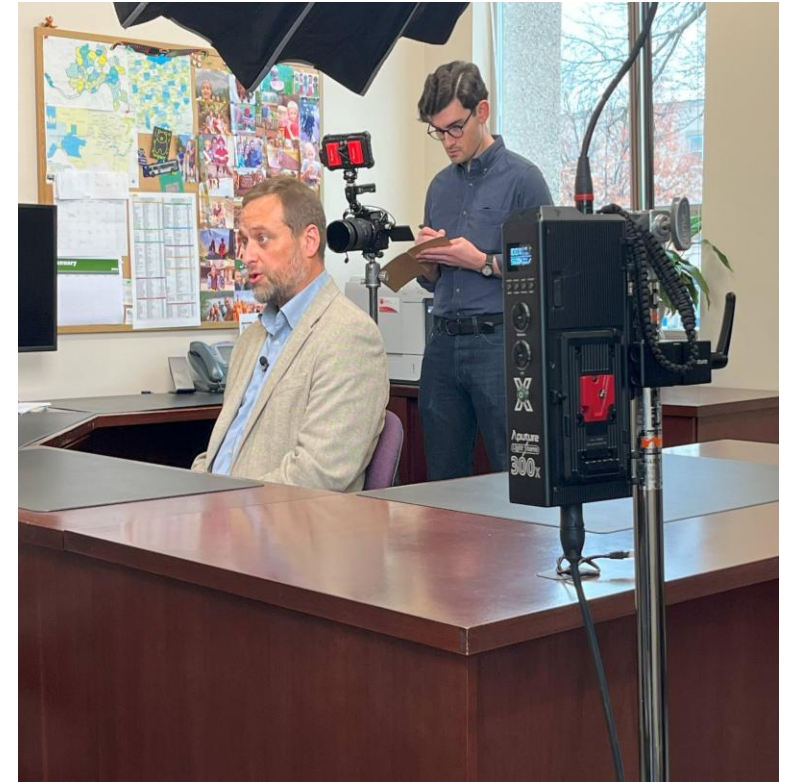
Consider what you want locals to do or think about after the story – talk to their doctor, get an immunization or treatment, take disease-prevention measures, shoot down rumors.

What's the local angle?

Reporters want to consider what state or national issues could mean for local residents. Be prepared for this.

Remember WIIFM.

Find out what drives a reporter or their editor – getting an exclusive, discussing a notable topic, being first, filling an empty story slot, going viral/getting engagement.



Ask the Medical Director



How do you determine what your **main desired action** or takeaway should be when giving interviews?

Explain Ideas Simply

Do the prep work.

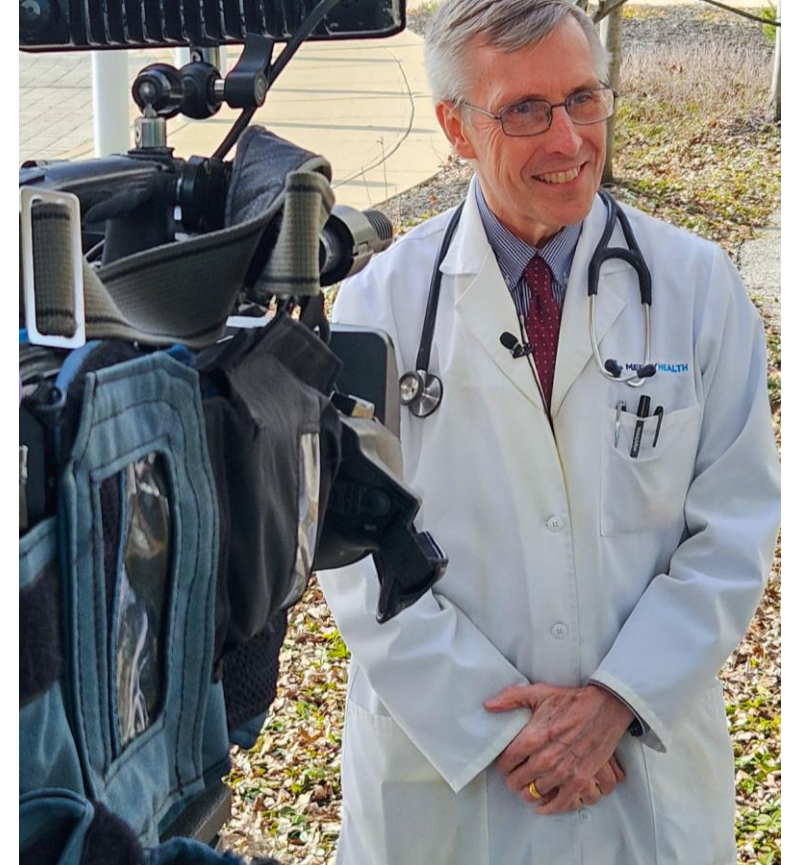
For thorny issues, review phase one messaging work, understand the reporter's interview style, and get briefed on new situational updates.

Think like a reporter.

What might this reporter ask? What can you relate to your experiences? Be ready with key phrases for soundbites and tip lists or stats for bullet graphics. Tip: short, relatable answers!

Keep it simple.

What do you truly want audiences to understand? Choose 1-3 key points or actions and keep coming back to them.



Reporters' Five W's (and an H)

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

Share the Love



There are **many** esteemed public health agencies and professional associations. **Mention quality work and recommendations** from those groups as needed.

Be Transparent



Be realistic with your availability.

Interviews, prep work and follow-ups take time. Share your schedule with your PIO to streamline media scheduling.

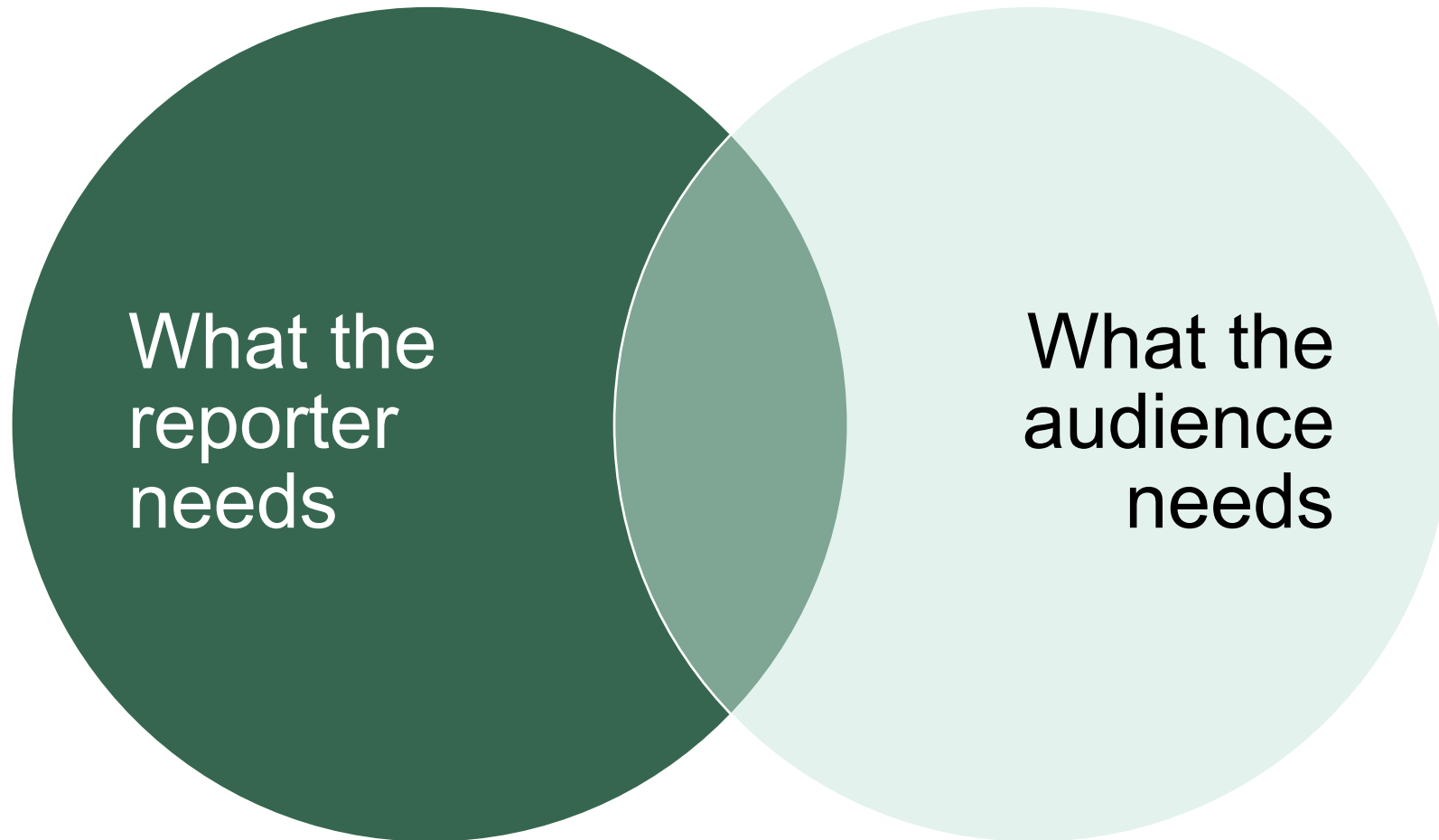
You don't know what you don't know.

Share truthfully when you're still learning about a situation. It's OK to send a statement or decline an interview if you don't have enough info.

Follow up afterward.

Work with your PIO to send useful links, reports, spellings, art and clarifications to the reporter ASAP.

Double WIIFM



Find the Heart of the Story



Make dense info **easier to understand** through a main character. Take the reporter on the **character's journey**.

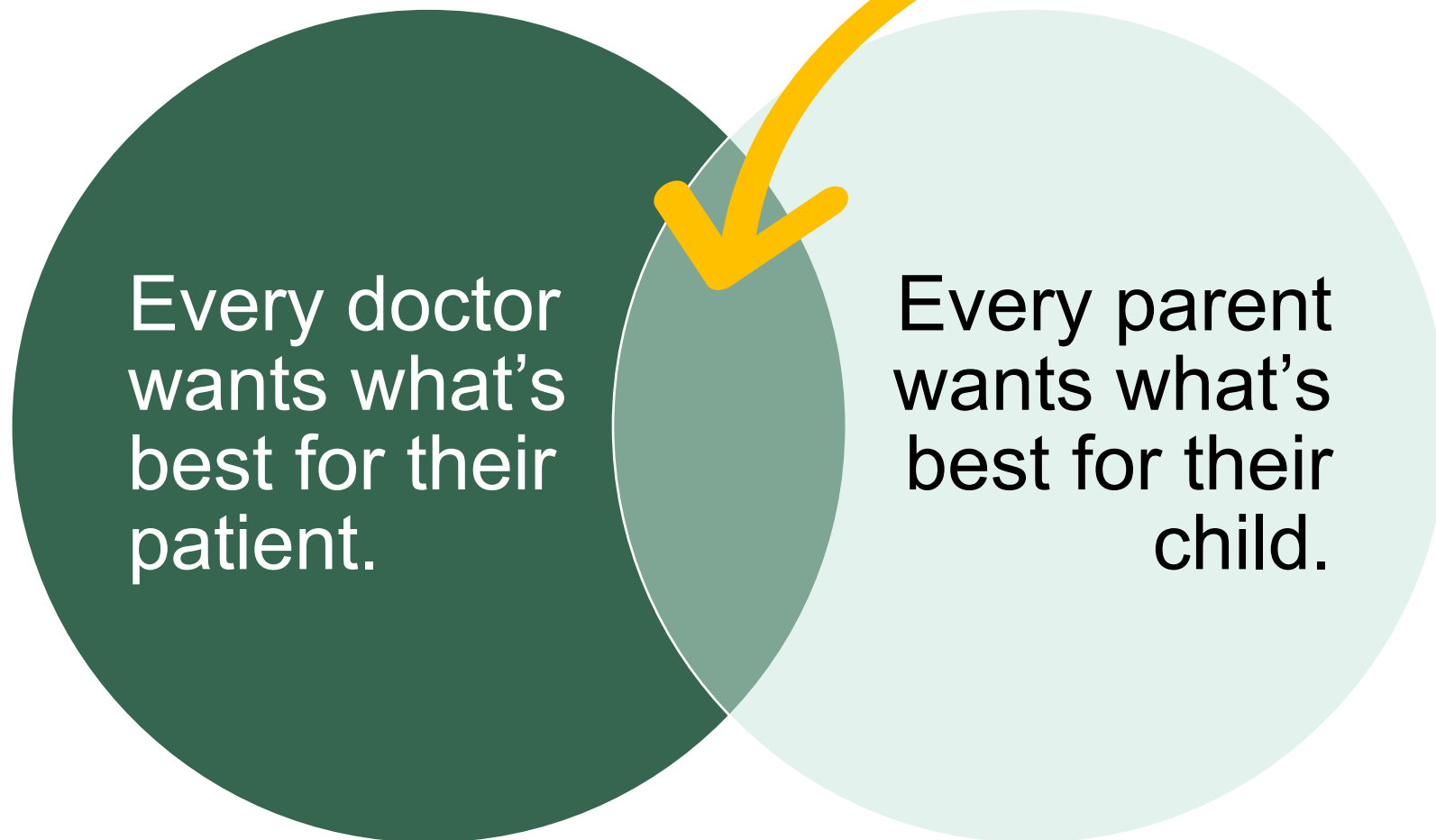
Success Story - Immunizations

- HCPH monitored **national conversations** about immunizations and began determining **shared language early**.
- HCPH partnered with Cincinnati Health Dept. and NKY Health Dept. to develop an **aligned, regional immunization message** for back-to-school.
- Alignment among the region's largest three health departments was **noted in media pitches, website stories and social media posts**.
- In interviews, Dr. Feagins used soft language to highlight **relatable immunization benefits** and encouraged patients to **talk with their doctors**.
- Our message **continued to repeat and resonate among reporters** throughout August and got **buy-in from other regional health leaders**.

Storytelling Opportunities

- Use **simple terms** to describe what you want the **public** to know. Use **meatiy science** for what you need the **reporter** to understand.
- **Relate your explanations** to the reporter, your patient or a family member to make them memorable (**WIIFM**): “As an older person, your mom is probably worried about this. Mine is, too. Here’s what I’d suggest.”
- **Mix stories with stats**: “Three out of four of us qualify now for this vaccine, and many of the remaining people also will when under a doctor’s care.”
- **Think in bullets**: your tips could be highlighted as an anchor read, shoulder graphic, print sidebar or social post.

This Still Applies!



Keep in Mind

- Reporters don't owe you a story.
- Assignment editors and reporters may have different WIIFM.
- You can't see the piece before publication or broadcast.
- The original story might be repackaged in multiple ways.
- Both assigned and completed stories are killed all the time.

Section Three: REPORTER Q&A

On the Line:

Liz Bonis

WKRC-TV

health anchor / reporter



Final Thoughts

Things to Remember

- **Monitor** national news and consider **local angles** early.
- Determine **key points** and language. Repeat, repeat, repeat.
- **Connect** with your target – be relatable, be empathetic, be humble, be human.
- Remember **WIIFM: What's In It For Me?**
- Make it easy for a reporter to **tell a story** and for a patient to **hear a story**.
- Be a reliable, steady, **helpful voice**.

Contact Us

Allison Babka

Public information officer

allison.babka@hamilton-co.org

Dr. Stephen Feagins

Medical director

sfeagins@mercy.com



hcph.org



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