

Talking to the Press

Introduction

Midland Fertility Services promotes the good things that can be achieved in fertility treatment through newspapers, radio and TV.

Journalists and production companies regularly contact MFS for case studies of couples and their experiences of fertility treatment, especially around the time of any big event such as a clinic birthday party.

Media relations at MFS is managed by Jill Anthony-Ackery, a former patient and now the unit's communications manager. If any patient would like to talk consider telling their story to the press, they should contact Jill on:

07795 812523 or via:

jill.anthony-ackery@midlandfertility.com

MFS is bound by strict codes of confidentiality, but where patients are happy to share their stories, MFS will work with them to ensure they are happy with the process and outcome.

This is a guide to what is involved in talking to the media about fertility treatment.

General

If a patient would like to talk to the press, they should complete a 'Share your Story' form, available in the Patients' Area of www.midlandfertility.com or by contacting Jill. This gives Jill a summary of the treatment story and an idea of the type of media they would like to talk to.

Occasionally, when a patients' story is of significant news value, Jill will compile the story by face-to-face, or by telephone interview.

MFS will always get the patient's approval on any information about their case study BEFORE it is released to the press. MFS will only pass on details of the story to legitimate media enquiries, after obtaining patient consent, and after explaining the enquiry to the patient and getting approval to pass on their telephone number.

After completing a 'Share your Story' form

- Jill will contact the patient and acknowledge receipt of the form and talk through their story to learn a little more about them and their treatment
- she will discuss the type of current media enquiries, to gauge which opportunities the patient would feel comfortable with
- Jill will hold the details and contact the patient when she receives a suitable press enquiry
- Jill will assess the integrity and relevance of any press enquiry and then phone the patient

- during this call to you, Jill will:
 - summarise the key issue of the enquiry
 - discuss any time limits
 - advise if the media will make any payment for the case study. (The rule of thumb is: if the patient is happy to talk to the press and a fee is offered, the patient could consider accepting it, but never be persuaded to talk only for the fee)
 - advise if any photography will be necessary
 - confirm the journalist's / photographer's name/s
 - advise where the interview needs to take place
 - ask if the patient is willing to be interviewed in connection with the story
- if the patient is willing to be interviewed by the journalist, Jill will check:
 - what information they are willing to share with the journalist. At this stage, Jill may draft a paragraph summarising the story, which she will then read to you before you give your approval. This is an opportunity for the patient to make any amendments to the information, so they are totally happy with what is released to the press. However, it is unlikely that the information will be used in this exact format
 - on which telephone number, and the most suitable time, the journalist should call the patient
 - remind the patient that they are able to withdraw from any press activity at any opportunity, until such time as production/broadcast deadlines are beyond the control of MFS
- only at this stage, when Jill talks to the journalist she will confirm:
 - the patient's name
 - the story summary
 - the town/area in which they live (but not the full address, unless the patient have given express permission for this and only if the journalist needs to visit)
- during the interview, Jill will advise the patient to:
 - answer the questions from their own personal point of view (rather than discussing wider issues of fertility treatment in general). This way they can't go 'wrong'
 - refer the journalist back to MFS if they want a comment on wider fertility treatment issues
 - never feel pressured into answering any question that they feel uncomfortable with
 - enjoy the experience - it will be a lovely cutting / video clip for their baby's memory box
- Jill will call the patient after the interview to ensure all has gone well and to confirm when the story will be published or broadcast (if known)
- Jill will keep the patient's details as a possible case study until they contact her to advise that they are no longer able or willing to talk to the press

Important

If a reporter contacts a patient without Jill calling them first, they haven't come via MFS and should be referred back to Jill. Please remember:

- MFS cannot guarantee the content and style of any coverage of your story. However, Jill works closely with the media to ensure the process is beneficial and memorable for all involved
- once information is in the public domain, MFS has no control over how or where it is used

Do's & don'ts for talking to the press

Talking to the press can be a pleasant experience and provide a lovely addition to a baby's 'memory box'. MFS can help this happen by following these tips.

- if a patient wants to share their story, do it through MFS. MFS can offer guidance and support
- the patient should clarify with MFS exactly what they are prepared to discuss with a reporter
- always talk from personal experience - a patient shouldn't feel they have to comment on general medical or ethical issues regarding fertility treatment
- if they are happy to talk to the press and a fee is offered by the press, the patient could consider accepting it, but should never be persuaded to talk only for the fee
- on the day the story is published/broadcast, the patient should consider 'scanning' phone calls for the next 48 hours and refer any unsolicited enquiries to Jill
- don't ever feel pressured into talking to the press
- never accept any cold-call approaches from the media either by phone or on the door-step - refer these to Jill at MFS and hang-up or shut the door if necessary
- don't share any information with the journalist that you would not like to appear in print or to be broadcast

Different media, different approaches

The following are basic guidelines to dealing with different types of media.

Newspapers

- MFS will request the chance to 'check the science' of any news or feature, but there is:
 - rarely the opportunity to see news stories in advance, because of production deadlines
 - more chance to see 'features' in advance and MFS will either email or read the text to the patient for their approval. That is the time to request any changes
- newspapers do not pay for news stories but may offer the patient a fee for a feature - allow MFS to negotiate this (there is no charge for doing so)

Radio

- interviews may happen 'live' or be 'pre-recorded' for later broadcast
- a patient may be asked to give the interview by phone or to come to the studio - for which MFS can request transport
- no fee is paid for radio interviews

TV

- daily lifestyle programmes (eg GMTV, LK Today) often give only 24 hours notice that they would like to interview a couple - TV news may give even less
- TV documentaries take many hours or even days of filming and will want to film key parts of any treatment
- MFS can negotiate a fee and arrange transport and hotel accommodation with the TV programme if required

Magazines

- consumer magazines are looking for an angle to sell more magazines. Some are more sympathetic and sensitive than others
- MFS prefers to work with a couple of freelancers who are familiar with the clinic and its standards
- if MFS can see the article before it goes to press, Jill will pass it to the patient for their approval too
- magazines usually pay a fee for a story
- magazines will issue a contract to confirm the fee and prevent the patient talking to the press for a specified period after publication of the story. While Jill is not legally qualified, always pass this on to Jill at MFS to be checked, before signing

News agencies

MFS does not recommend patients should talk to news agencies. Please refer all enquiries from news agencies directly to MFS

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