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Promoting your dermatology practice

Take advantage of public's interest in skincare

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By: [LISETTE HILTON](#)

Dermatology Times



Katherine Rothman

Whether they are on the "Today" show talking with Katie Couric about summer skincare tips, on "The View" chatting with the ladies about the latest in anti-wrinkle technology, or featured in the *New York Times* as experts on melanoma, dermatologists are making their way into the media's limelight. Some hire publicists, or public relations professionals, to attract media coverage; others try what can be a daunting task on their own.

Healthcare public relations expert Katherine M. Rothman, CEO of KMR Communications Inc., New York City, says doctors should become educated about

how to approach the media before taking the plunge. An owner of a public relations firm that specializes in the health and beauty markets, Ms. Rothman says the practice of dermatology is becoming more entwined with the beauty industry. Some dermatologists have medical spas in their offices, others sell skincare products, and many are focusing on providing fee-for-service cosmetic procedures.

Patients who come in for cosmetic procedures or spa services do not necessarily choose their doctors from a health plan book; rather, they typically choose them based on word-of-mouth or the buzz generated from media coverage, she says. And landing a national placement in the *Vogues* and *Allures* of the world can help put a dermatology practice on the map. Her dermatologist clients use clips from their media coverage as marketing materials, displaying them on Web sites or in their offices, to gain perceived credibility.

Ms. Rothman recommends that doctors hire PR professionals with experience in their specialties rather than attempt to get media placement themselves. "[Doctors] do not have the time to do this correctly. They do not know the angles to pitch to the media; they do not have the connections with the appropriate media," she says. "For them, it is just a cold call, and they are probably not going to be giving something to a media in a consumer-friendly way. Also, it does not look good when a doctor is promoting himself or herself to the media directly."

But for those who are determined to go it alone, she offers these tips:

- Do not focus only on local coverage. Pursue television and radio

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stations, newspapers and magazines in the local market. But also send information to national media that would reach your target markets, including *Vogue*, CNN and others. The national stories lend the most "cache" to the practice, she says.

- Know the difference between public relations and advertising. In a public relations campaign you would not call an editor and say you want a story about your practice in the publication. "Editorial coverage is something that has to have an inherent patient benefit. It cannot read the same way that advertising can. In an ad you can say, 'Come and see Dr. Jones. He delivers great results for patients in a caring environment.' (But) anything that a PR firm pitches to the media has to have an angle that has a consumer benefit," she says. "It has to discuss a new trend, a procedure or put the physician in the position of being a patient advocate. It cannot be blatantly self-promotional."
- Tell the media that you exist and offer some ideas for stories. Get a list of health and beauty editors and television producers through services such as Bacon's. E-mail the media with your CV and perhaps a link to your Web site and explain that you would be a good source for interviews. Give the contact person some bulleted points on different topics that the media might want to address, citing any new or innovative techniques that you might be implementing. Let your contacts know about any pro bono work that you are doing.
- Know how to work with the media. You can get media training to prepare for media coverage by checking with the Public Relations Society of America (<http://www.prsa.org/>) and asking for local experts.
- Consider hosting a cocktail party for the local media as a means of introducing the media to your practice.
- Link up with a local spa or a skincare company and offer your services as a dermatologic expert.
- Contact public relations firms that represent drug, skincare or hair care companies and let them know that you would be a great physician source or product spokesperson. "That way, [dermatologists] can benefit from the media coverage of a well-established product. They do not necessarily have to be a consultant or researcher with the company. Essentially, they are benefiting by having a PR firm without paying for it," Ms. Rothman says.
- Network with other people who are related but noncompeting physicians or professionals. Included in this list are spa owners and technicians, cosmetic dentists, as well as staff of large local gyms or fitness centers. "These centers might have health nights or times when they bring experts to talk with members," Ms. Rothman says.

Many spas now are interested in bringing in dermatologists to do procedures such as Botox or Restylane. Find out if you might be that doctor.

- If you have published a new study or have something that you are investigating, the media would like to see a press release. Make sure that everything that you send to the media is presented in a consumer-friendly way. Most reporters and editors do not have medical training and do not have the time to decipher complicated subjects.
- Be careful what you pitch. It has to offer some benefit to readers, viewers or listeners. Bad examples of story ideas are: Dr. Smith is a magna cum laude graduate; Dr. Smith adds a new physician; or Dr. Smith does the most natural-looking facelift and has a caring staff. "You have to have an actual hook," Ms. Rothman says. "[Examples of good story ideas include] decoding dermatology: what do cosmetic labels mean? or post-summer skincare tips."
- Comply with the media when they do call to get a quote. Do not have your own agenda. If a media person calls and is interested in talking about adult acne, answer the reporter's questions and refrain from talking about what is new in your office unless it applies to the subject at hand, according to Ms. Rothman. "Media people are on deadline, and if you can give them a good sound bite and be cooperative, they will add you to their Rolodex and see you as a continual source."

- Do not insist on seeing the story before it goes to print. The doctor should not try to be the director or editor. Let the editor dictate the direction of the story. If you are not comfortable with the story angle, do not participate.
- Have good before and after photos and a few willing patients available in case a media opportunity comes up. Make sure to get patients' permissions first.
- If you do hire a PR firm, find one that does PR in dermatology or a related field. Those are the only firms that will have built up the right connections with the beauty and health media, according to Ms. Rothman. Your target PR firm would not be one that has major placements for hotel or celebrity clients.

Before signing on the dotted line, ask the firm for examples of successful campaign tactics for physicians. Assess their knowledge of medical terminology. If they cannot speak your language, writing press releases will be a long, painful process. Ask for examples of press releases. Make sure that the firm is planning to get placements with media outlets that will benefit your practice. Get references. Know the account executive-to-client ratio and how much time would be devoted to your account. Find out how you are going to be updated. Ask if there are other expenses, so you understand not only the service fee but also any other costs.

Finally, don't hire a PR firm or start a PR campaign as a quick fix for an ailing practice or a burnt-out doctor. Make sure your practice is running smoothly and you have the energy to take on this sort of a commitment.