



Making health stories land: What journalists actually look for



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In a crowded, fast-moving media landscape, getting your message heard is harder than ever. Journalists are navigating constant noise, limited time and an endless stream of statistics, announcements and competing headlines. For communicators, that creates both a challenge and an opportunity: cut-through is more difficult to achieve, but the potential to reach highly engaged audiences across multiple formats has never been greater.

The stories that land are rarely just about data. Numbers matter because they provide proof, credibility and scale. But data on its own does not make people care.

What gives a healthcare story real traction is the human meaning behind it: the patient waiting for access, the clinician seeing the difference a treatment makes, the family living with uncertainty, or the innovator trying to solve a pressing unmet need. When evidence is paired with emotion, stories do more than inform, they connect.

That is especially true in health, where the stakes are deeply personal and the best journalism often combines hard facts with lived experience. The most effective stories prove and move at the same time: they are relevant, credible, timely and rooted in real life.

If you want your story to cut through, shape the debate and leave a lasting impression, you need more than a strong announcement. You need a story people can feel, understand and remember.

To discuss how we can help you do this, get in touch with **Grant Fisher** at GrantFisher@wacomms.com.



GRANT FISHER
Head of Health
Communications

What makes a strong health story?

The stories that land do two things at once: they prove and they move.

A person, not a population

Anchor the story in someone real. If we can't picture who this is about, it's hard to care or act.

A clear before and after

What has changed, and what does this enable.

A single emotional truth

Focus on the one thing people should feel: hope, urgency, relief, injustice.

Proof that stands up

Evidence earns credibility. In healthcare, it must hold up under clinical, regulatory and public scrutiny.

A reason it matters now

Why this story, at this moment? Relevance is what makes it land.

Numbers earn credibility.

Human impact earns attention.

If we could tell you one thing...

"My main tip would be to always try and humanise every story. One great, pictured patient case study is much more effective at telling a story than multiple exclusive data sets. Ideally provide some quotes but also let us chat to the case study ourselves – it usually only requires 15 minutes on the phone. Another key point that PRs often miss is the importance of pictures. If a story doesn't come with any photos (such as of a case study or of the researchers involved) then it is very unlikely to get published. Also, always include a phone number on pitches!"



ELEANOR HAYWARD
Health Editor,
The Times

"Before pitching a story to the Daily Mail, consider whether it is something your friends and close relatives would be genuinely interested to know. Alternatively, is it something you think they really need to know in order to improve or protect their health. What is interesting or important to your client, organisation or chief executive is not necessarily of interest to the general public. Aim to build a reputation as someone who only sends out quality press releases or story ideas. You will have greater success pitching a small number of strong stories than bombarding us."



SHAUN WOOLLER
Health Editor,
Daily Mail

Why different media matter

Choosing the right channel shapes who you reach and the impact you have.

Broadsheet

(e.g. The Times, The Guardian)

- Shapes national conversation and policy debate
- Signals scale, seriousness and credibility
- Influences stakeholders and decision-makers

Best for:

Stories that connect individual experience to wider system issues

Red top

(Daily Mail, The Mirror)

- Massive reach and immediacy
- Cuts through with clear, emotional storytelling
- Drives public awareness quickly

Best for:

Stories with strong human impact and clear emotional stakes

Broadcast

(BBC Breakfast, Loose Women)

- High visibility and memorability
- Brings stories to life through people and visuals
- Builds rapid understanding at scale

Best for:

Human stories, demonstrable impact, visual innovation

32%

of adults say they have used AI tools for health advice in the past year (KFF)



Regional

(Yorkshire Post, Liverpool Echo)

- Builds trust within local communities
- Connects directly to patient populations
- Often more open to lived experience stories
- Plays a growing role in shaping trusted, location-specific content used by AI tools

Best for:

Local impact, service delivery, access to care



Radio & podcasts

(The Today Programme, Woman's Hour)

- Allows for depth, nuance and storytelling
- Builds trust through voice and conversation
- Reaches highly engaged audiences

Best for:

Expert voices, lived experience, complex topics made accessible

Trade & specialist media

(PharmaTimes, HSJ)

- Reaches decision-makers, experts and partners
- Builds credibility within the sector
- Supports adoption, collaboration and change
- High-quality, evidence-led content increasingly informs how AI tools surface and interpret healthcare topics

Best for:

Innovation, data, implementation and system-level insight



What to do differently

Ask “for whom is this strong?” not just “is this strong?”

A story can work brilliantly for one audience and fall flat for another.

Identify one emotional truth

Not every angle. Just the one that makes the story land.

Translate innovation into consequence

Don't just explain what it is, show what it changes in real life.

Never separate humanity from evidence

Credible, human storytelling matters more than ever in a low-trust, AI-shaped environment.

Tailor relentlessly

The story stays the same. The framing should reflect the audience you need to reach and the outcome you need to achieve.

Final thought

There is no shortage of remarkable stories in healthcare. The challenge is making them land.

Because the stories that cut through don't just generate coverage, they show what progress actually looks like. Not in a statistic. But in a person's life.

40%

of people say they trust the news, making clear, human and credible storytelling more important than ever

(Reuters Institute, 2025)

72%

of journalists still use press releases as a key resource but only when they are relevant

(Cision, 2025)

85%

of journalists say relationship-building by email remains valuable

(Cision, 2025)





About

We are a strategic consultancy that brings together public affairs, communications, patient advocacy, and creative services to help our clients achieve policy and reputational outcomes.

The health practice is a multi-award winning team of communications and creative experts, driven by the idea that healthcare can always be better. Our work focuses on the critical role of engagement and communication, to help deliver the full potential of innovative care advances within an increasingly complex and evolving health system.

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