Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care

An International Journal of Prehospital Care Research, Education, Clinical Practice, Policy and Service Delivery

ISSN 1447-4999

BOOK REVIEW

Article 990196

‘Media Relations for Public Safety Professionals’

Leo M Brown. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 2004.

92 pages, ISBN 0 76373 167 6.

RRP \$51.15 AUD

Mardi Chapman

Keywords

book review; media; media policy; media relations

Brown’s practical manual to media relations is a must-read for police, emergency services workers and health professionals with frontline jobs at accidents, fires, rescues, natural disasters, and other dangerous and often tragic incidents.

These events are core business for the news media as well, and public safety professionals inevitably find themselves sharing their turf with the reporters and photographers who package such dramas to their readers, listeners and the viewing public.

The book quickly establishes that the media is a business, and news is its basic commodity. However the author also emphasises that the media is not the enemy and can in fact be a useful partner in the business of public safety.

Consider for example the media’s important role in disseminating information to the public about hazardous situations, evacuations and product recalls.

Each of the 11 chapters starts with clear learning objectives and finishes with a summary or “wrap up”, a set of review questions, and a practical scenario exercise to work through.

Early chapters set the scene for the interface between public safety and media professionals by defining and demystifying the different types of media, how they operate, what they regard as news, and the ethical and the legal framework that influences their craft.

They also explore the roles and responsibilities of frontline law enforcement and disaster response workers when they encounter news media at an incident.

In particular, he cautions about straying from providing more than the basic facts about a situation and technical or operational specifics; commenting beyond an area of expertise; breaching patient or victim confidentiality; and avoiding speculation, opinion and predictions.

Later chapters provide practical advice for dealing with the media and making the most of these opportunities.

Author(s): Mardi Chapman

Brown's tips range from understanding the employer's media policy, to controlling the interview process, dealing with the fear of public speaking, and looking and sounding professional. He clarifies the risks of using too much jargon, why "no comment" is never an acceptable response, and what "off the record" really means.

Chapter 10 turns the table on the news media - suggesting ways that organisations can be proactive in finding their own good news stories and presenting them to the media.

The book also features a sample media policy and media release, a glossary, and a pre and post test of readers' knowledge about the news media.

Overall, this publication is a useful introduction to the topic of media relations in emergency situations which are often complicated by danger and emotion. Public safety professionals will benefit from its no-fuss approach to the realities of media involvement and be better prepared to deal with such situations more effectively and to everyone's advantage.

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