

Public Speaking for the Podiatric Physician—Part 1



The key to a successful execution is careful planning.

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Note: This is part one of a two-part article.

It is true that most doctors do not enjoy public speaking. Most physicians are comfortable with one-to-one conversations with patients; however, physicians are out of their comfort zone when it comes to speaking in front of other physicians, colleagues, and even lay men and women. This article will discuss the preparation, the presentation, and what you need to do after the program is over to become an effective public speaker.

Most doctors and healthcare professionals pride themselves as good communicators. After all, that is how we take a history and then discuss our findings with our patients and then provide them with advice for restoring or maintaining their health. Except, however, for bedside presentations to faculty or a presentation at grand rounds, we have received little training on public speaking. Except for those doctors who have had formal media training, few of us are naturally comfortable or proficient in front of the T.V. camera. For the most part, though, public speaking is a learned skill and with just a little practice and preparation, all of us can become good or even excellent public speakers. As a result, we can learn how to make a presentation in front of peers, before lay audiences, and not panic when we are in front of the T.V. camera. This article is intended to provide you with tips and

techniques to enhance your public speaking skills.

Speaking Before Your Peers

Many of you will have attended a speaker training program sponsored by a pharmaceutical company or a medical manufacturing company. Pharmaceutical companies will make available a slide deck of PowerPoint slides and review with you the salient points that they would like for you to cover during your presentation to a group of your

public speaking. This is one public speaking program that nearly all of us have or will have an opportunity to participate in. This will usually be industry-sponsored and you will use the slide deck provided to you by the pharmaceutical company or the medical manufacturer whose product you are discussing. There are three areas that are important to discuss and they are 1) before the program, 2) the actual dinner program, and finally 3) after the program is over.

“People’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”—Jerry Seinfeld

peers. Because of Pharma guidelines, you will be asked not to deviate from the slides you were provided. This usually means that you will not be allowed to delete slides and not be able to add your own slides if you are speaking at a program that is sponsored or supported by the pharmaceutical company. But these restrictions need not limit your creativity and ability to make a compelling presentation that will educate your peers and make you a requested speaker on behalf of your sponsoring company.

The evening or dinner program with 10-15 of your peers is one of the most common examples of

Before the Program

You need to know and review your slide material thoroughly. It is important that you understand every slide in the slide deck and that you are comfortable with the material on the slide. The best speakers are so comfortable with the slides that they can discuss the slide without having to look at it. You want to avoid reading from the slides. Reading from the slides results in breeding boredom and loss of interest on the part of the audience. If you are looking at the slides, you are not looking at the audience and you will lose your ability to connect with the audience. The

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best speakers who want to connect with their audiences practice and rehearse their presentations. The experts never “wing” it. Your audience will be able to tell immediately if you took the slide deck directly from the CD, loaded it into a computer, and are giving the talk for the first time.

Rehearse your talk several times out loud with all the props and audiovisual equipment you plan to use. This kind of pre-program practice will help to control the filler words such as “a” and “um”. It is helpful to practice your slide transitions, your pauses, and even your breathing. You also need to know how long the program is to last, and how long you are to speak. The experts never go beyond their allotted time. Practice with a timer and be certain that you do not exceed the allocated time. Most dinner meetings don’t start on time as doctors are often delayed at arriving during the week because of unexpected events that occur in the practice. As a result, you may have to shorten your program so you need to allow time for the unexpected.

If you are speaking at a restaurant, then you want to ask the meeting planner to request a private room. There are so many distractions if you speak in a restaurant with other diners near your program. The topics discussed at a venue that allows non-physicians to watch the slides and hear the program will not endear you to the other guests and the owner of the restaurant.

Audiovisual Requirements

Before the program, communicate with the pharmaceutical representative or the meeting planner. Find out if they will provide the computer, the projector, and the screen. If not, let them know what you will bring and what kind of a computer you have and make sure it is compatible with the projector. If you have a MAC, you will need an Apple adapter which is different than the standard PC adapter. One of us (NHB) found this out when a MAC computer didn’t have a cable to connect to the LCD projector that was PC compatible. Also, you will probably

not require a microphone for a small group, but if you are speaking in a loud restaurant, a microphone may be helpful.

It is highly recommended that you are the first to arrive at the program. This way you can be sure that the computers, LCD project, screen placement, and seating are all in order before the program. Nothing can sidetrack a speaker, even the best seasoned speaker, more than finding that there is a problem with the computer or the equipment and

possible, they should avoid walking in front of the projector. Ideally, you should end before the dessert arrives and can use this time to conduct the question and answer session. You should also ask the pharmaceutical representative about the company’s goals and objectives for the program and make certain that you can deliver on them.

Preparing a handout for the program is an excellent idea. Don’t distribute the handout before the program as you want your audience to

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that your flash drive with a USB port does not load into the pharmaceutical representative’s computer, or that your program created on a MAC computer does not “translate” on the representative’s PC.

When you are one of the first to arrive, you can greet some of the physician audience members as they arrive. It is far easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers. Also, if you can remember their names, you can call on them and ask their opinion or how they might manage a patient in their practice with the condition you are discussing. You might suggest that the meeting planner have name tags and ask the group to place the name tag on their clothing when they enter the venue. An interactive presentation is the most enjoyable for the audience and the speaker.

It is a good idea to find out the agenda from the pharmaceutical representative before the program. We believe that the least favorable time to speak is before the meal, as you are practically holding the doctors hostage to hear the program. It’s best to speak after the appetizer is served and the orders have been taken by the wait staff. This way, the doctors have some food as well as some alcohol and are not starving. You can tell the waiters that they won’t be disturbing you but, if

focus on you, the speaker, and your slides and not on the handout. Tell the audience that you will be providing a handout of your presentation at the end of the program so that they need not waste time taking notes during your presentation.

Prepare an Introduction

You need to prepare an introduction. We suggest you write your own introduction and send a copy by e-mail to the person who will be introducing you. Tell the introducer that you are providing the introduction as a “suggestion” and that they are welcome to modify it if they wish. We have found that the majority of introducers or meeting planners are delighted to have the introduction prepared for them and will use it just as you have written it. You should bring a hard copy as you can be sure that many of the introducers will not have downloaded a copy and will not have remembered to bring it with them.

Show Time—Getting Ready

Public speakers, like athletes, have to get ready and prepare for the program.

a) If you’re a woman wearing high heels, take them off. Now, stand on one leg and shake the other. When you put your foot back on the

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ground, it's going to feel lighter than the other one. Now, switch legs and shake. You want your energy to go through the floor and out of your head. This sounds quite cosmic; it isn't. It's a practical technique used by actors.

b) Shake your hands...fast. Hold them above your head, bending at the wrist and elbow and then bring your hands back down. This will make your hand movements more natural.

c) Warm up your face muscles by chewing in a highly exaggerated way. Do shoulder and neck rolls. Imagine that you are at eye level with a clock. As you look at 12, pull as much of your face up to 12 as you can; now move it to 3, then down to 6 and finally over to 9.

All of these exercises serve to warm you up and relax you. Those exaggerated movements make it easier for your movements to flow more naturally once you start your program. Preparation is a key element to

- Is it in good taste?
- Does it relate to me (my service), the event, or the group? Does it support your topic or its key points?

A humorous story or an inspirational vignette relating to your topic

moment you have to motivate your audience to take action on your material and your program. Summarize the key elements to your presentation: e.g., overview of common medical problems, prevention, treatments, etc. If you're going to take questions, say, "Before my closing remarks, are

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or audience is a sure way to get an audience's attention. However, it may take more presentation skill than you possess in the beginning of your speaking career. It's safer and more effective to give the audience what you know and what makes you the person to present the material.

A good way to open your speech is by giving the audience the information they most want to hear. By

there any questions?" Finish with something inspirational that ties into your theme.

The Genentech scientist told of the frustrations of being a scientist and he closed by saying, "People often ask, 'why should anyone want to be a scientist?'" His closing story told of a particularly information-intensive medical conference he attended. The final speaker of the day opened with, "I am a 32-year-old wife and mother of two. I have AIDS. Please work fast," she said to the scientists. He got a standing ovation for the speech. (From "Public Speaking for Podiatrists," *Podiatry Management*, Patricia Fripp)

Summary

Public speaking is one of the best ways to market and promote your skills as a physician. It is an ethical way of communicating with your peers and an opportunity to showcase your speaking skills and your areas of interest or expertise. It all begins with conscientious preparation. **PM**

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making a solid presentation. Here are a few tips that will help you make an effective presentation.

The Opening

Psychologists have proven that the first and last 30 seconds of any speech have the most impact, so give the open and close of your talk a little extra thought, time, and effort. Do not open with "Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be here tonight." It's wasting too much of those precious 30 seconds.

Opening a speech with a joke or funny story is the conventional wisdom. Before you do, ask yourself these questions:

- Is it appropriate to the occasion, or for this audience?

now, you know the questions you hear most at a cocktail reception or professional society meeting. Put the answers to those questions in your speech.

A scientist with Genentech was preparing a speech for a woman's group. Since most of the audience didn't know what scientists are like or what they do, he told them what it was like to be a scientist. "Being a scientist is like doing a jigsaw puzzle in a snowstorm at night...you don't have all the pieces...and you don't have the picture to work from." You really can say more with less.

The Closing

The close should be one of the highlights of your speech. This is the