Communicating the Impact of the Research We Fund

March 20, 2013
Health Research Alliance Members’ Meeting
Chevy Chase, MD
What’s the Urgency?
Science is at Risk

- Arbitrary, across-the-board 10-year cuts, known as sequestration, will devastate U.S. science
- Brain drain from U.S. is escalating
- Taxpayers, including your donors, are looking for a solid return on investment
- Few elected officials are comfortable talking about science
- Few science-trained journalists in the new age of communications
Effective Communication Can ...

- Increase public awareness and support of federal funding for research
- Increase donor support of research
- Maintain and expand policy maker support
What We’ve Learned About Effective Communication

• Put a human face on science
• Align with public sentiment and current news
• Know your audience
• Tell your story, not your data
• Don’t let misleading/inaccurate media stories stand
• Learn from journalists and elected officials
• Do it yourself
Scientists Most Trusted Spokespersons for Science News

How trustworthy do you consider each of the following to be as spokespersons for science news?

- Scientists: 40% Very trustworthy, 50% Somewhat trustworthy, 5% Not very trustworthy, 3% Not at all trustworthy, 3% Don't know
- Health care professionals: 30% Very trustworthy, 56% Somewhat trustworthy, 9% Not very trustworthy, 3% Not at all trustworthy, 3% Don't know
- Non-profit/voluntary health organizations: 25% Very trustworthy, 57% Somewhat trustworthy, 10% Not very trustworthy, 2% Not at all trustworthy, 6% Don't know
- Journalists: 12% Very trustworthy, 48% Somewhat trustworthy, 25% Not very trustworthy, 8% Not at all trustworthy, 7% Don't know
- Religious leaders: 11% Very trustworthy, 36% Somewhat trustworthy, 22% Not very trustworthy, 18% Not at all trustworthy, 13% Don't know
- Government officials: 8% Very trustworthy, 28% Somewhat trustworthy, 34% Not very trustworthy, 24% Not at all trustworthy, 6% Don't know

Source: Florida Public Opinion Poll, September 2011
JZ Analytics for Research!America
Despite High Levels of Public Confidence, Scientists are Invisible in Our Society...
Most Americans Can’t Name a Living Scientist

Can you name a living scientist? (first volunteered responses)

- Yes: 34%
- No: 66%

- Stephen Hawking: 15%
- James Watson: 1%
- Jane Goodall: 1%
- Bill Nye: 1%
- Michio Kaku: 1%
- Neil Degrasse Tyson: 1%
- Other: 14%

Source: Your Congress - Your Health Survey, March 2011
Charlton Research Company for Research!America
Most Americans Don’t Know Where Research is Conducted

Can you name any institution, company or organization where medical and health research is conducted?

59% I can
41% I cannot

Mayo Clinic 10%
CDC 9%
NIH 7%
Johns Hopkins 6%
St. Jude 4%
Pfizer 3%
American Cancer Society 3%
Merck 2%
Duke Univ./Med. Ctr. 1%
OR Heath & Sci. Univ. 1%
UCSF 1%
Other 52%

Source: National Public Opinion Poll, October 2011, JZ Analytics for Research!America
“...public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

President Abraham Lincoln
Support for Research is Strong

Research!America-commissioned polling shows strong public support for:

- Basic research
- Embryonic stem cell research
- Health disparities research
- Research for the benefit of military veterans
- Behavioral research
- Global health research
People Want More Coverage of Research

Would you like to see more, less or about the same amount of information about science and research in the media?

- More: 60%
- About the same: 29%
- Less: 7%
- Not sure: 4%

Source: Florida Public Opinion Poll, September 2011
Zogby Analytics for Research!America
Know Your Audience:
Policy Makers
“Last year, Illinois received $884 million in NIH funding ... which created or supported nearly 12,000 jobs across the state. In 2007, the most recent year for which this data is available, NIH funding generated $1.8 billion dollars of business activity in Illinois.”

Press release from Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), February 27, 2011
“Long-term, controlling health care costs will require smarter federal investments in medical research. Many of today’s cures and lifesaving treatments are a result of an initial federal investment, and much of it is spent on cancer research and other grave illnesses.”

House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA), February 5, 2013
Tell Your Story, Not Your Data

Diagram of Afghan war operations scheme

New York Times, April 26, 2010
Stay Current About Research in the News

- A team of HIV experts achieved the first “functional cure” in an HIV-infected infant, a landmark finding that could lead to a better understanding of the HIV virus
- Be prepared to talk about science in real time: “What’s it got to do with me?”

Source: CNN.com, “Scientists more certain that particle is Higgs boson,” March 16, 2013
Media Fuels Confusion About Science

How to Have the Best Pregnancy Ever (Jezebel.com)

“Take fish oil supplements\(^1\) for better visual development of the baby and to prevent post-partum depression\(^2\). However, fish oil won’t help make your baby smart\(^3\), and it will lengthen your pregnancy\(^4\).

“Antidepressants are bad\(^5\), except that they’re fine\(^6\), except that they aren’t\(^7\), except that they are\(^8\).

“Does all this ambiguity stress you out? Stop!\(^9\) Expectant moms who are stressed give birth to children who get bullied\(^10\). Chill out\(^11\).”

Science in Real Time

- People are understandably confused by the three steps forward/two steps back dynamic process of science.
- By standing back or failing to engage, researchers aren’t helping resolve public confusion.
- Public support for science, and public willingness to engage in research, are at risk if researchers fail to engage.
Learn from Journalists

Alice Park, *TIME Magazine*

- Make science accessible in a human way
- The public appreciates it if they have a connection to the science

Claudia Dreifus, *New York Times*

- The Internet makes science available to the public as never before but also creates an extreme capacity for disinformation
- Reporters need a simple message and a headline, whereas science is full of nuance. That world of nuance isn’t how journalism or policy works
I admire and love my brother [Paul Greengard], but he lives on a higher plane, and what he does is secret, unrevealable. To me, anyway ...

“Every time he took a new job — whether at Albert Einstein College of Medicine or Yale — I’d ask him about it. Then he’d get into electro-physiological properties, and it was all over ...

“Now, he has won the Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine, an honor he shares with two other scientists. In reporting it, the newspapers said their work on the way brain cells communicate might one day help cure diseases like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s.

“I’m thrilled he won. Now I know what he does.”

— Chris Chase in a New York Times opinion piece on October 15, 2000
How skilled are scientists and researchers at presenting their case to Congress?

Rep. Brown: “They, generally speaking, have too great a faith in the power of common sense and reason. That’s not what drives political figures, who are concerned about emotions and the way a certain event will affect their constituency …”

The Honorable George E. Brown Jr. (1920-1999)

Q: What do elected officials, journalists and scientists have in common?

A: Concern about job security
In the Moment, Do-It-Yourself Journalism
What Can HRA Members do to Catalyze Change?

- Lead the research community by making communication with the non-science public a value to you and your grantees
- Partner with others to introduce young scientists to young journalists to break down distrust
- Develop workshops for scientists
- Recognize and reward public engagement
- Share best practices
Sample Content for Workshops/Courses
THEN...
In the 1980s, AIDS was a death sentence

NOW...
AIDS is treated as a chronic disease thanks to advancements in research

IMAGINE...
Putting AIDS in the history books!
Messaging: Social Math

• Americans’ spending on St. Patrick’s Day was expected to be $4.7 billion.

• That sum would fund heart disease research at the National Institutes of Health for nearly 4 years!

Sources: National Retail Federation; NIH FY 2012; Flickr photos by Selbe B (top) and Jack W. Pearce
“What you understand well can be communicated well. It's a matter of not just discipline but obligation to the public for scientists to communicate both the excitement of science, the prospects of science and the accomplishments of science.”

Elias A. Zerhouni, MD
“Scientists are obliged to make the case for science to lawmakers. ... If I had to do it all over again, I would spend more time talking to general audiences and public officials, penning op-eds.”

J. Michael Bishop, MD, Nobel laureate
Research!America Advocacy Awards, March 15, 2011
Why Aren’t More Scientists Engaged in Public Outreach? (in descending rank order)

- Don’t have time
- Aren’t being asked
- Don’t know how
- “Involvement makes no difference”
- Apathy/don’t want to
- Lack of incentives
- “Non-scientists won’t understand”
- Liability/fear of being misinterpreted
- Happy with the job others are doing

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