

# The nurse's growing role in media

By Alice Benjamin, MSN, RN, ACNS-BC

● Use your clinical expertise to communicate with your community.

**IT'S NO SECRET** that nurses are the heartbeat of healthcare, working long hours to take care of patients and their families, including providing them with the education they need to understand their health and medical conditions. Nurses also play a vital role in disseminating research into practice and leading national and international health missions. And, in national Gallup® polls, the public has ranked us the most trusted profession for 16 years in a row.

Despite being part of the largest segment within the healthcare workforce, with over 3.6 million nurses in the United States, nurses aren't in the media as much as you might expect. Why is it always a physician discussing important health issues, emerging research, and health education?

For decades, nurses have been battling unflattering Hollywood caricatures and images that influence public opinion of what we do and our knowledge and skillset and undermine our pursuit of goals such as quality care, safe staffing, and fair wages. It's time to change the narrative and show the public what nurses really do. We can change this perception by being the change we want to see in the media.

As nurses, we're primed with the knowledge and clinical expertise to deliver important health information using mainstream media, including television, radio, and print, as well as the internet. However, media puts the audience in a passive role to receive information, which isn't how nurses typically communicate with patients, so some training is needed. This training prepares nurses to speak succinctly and address important points while being mindful of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. (Visit [american.nursetoday.com/?p=37747](http://american.nursetoday.com/?p=37747) for tips on how to become more media savvy.)

Nurses are health experts who can collaborate with journalists and media outlets to ensure that health news is accurate and that important topics are addressed. They can provide content expertise and address crucial information, such as quality of evidence,



*Alice Benjamin, MSN, RN, ACNS-BC, speaking as a nurse expert about the opioid epidemic on KTLA news in Los Angeles.*

costs, and risks vs. benefits that might be overlooked by a journalist.

Mainstream media and the internet allow nurses to meet people where they are—in their living rooms watching TV and on their electronic devices—to provide benefits to those in the community who may not have access to healthcare, are without health insurance, or are afraid to go the doctor. The future of nursing requires us to embrace technology and media to educate patients, families, and the public beyond the bedside.

As a clinical nurse specialist, I've had the privilege of being a media health expert. I've found that media outlets and viewers appreciate my perspectives, professionalism, and expertise. I've appeared many times on national television shows and networks—including FOX News, CNN, HLN, KTLA, Dr. Oz, and The Doctors—discussing important health topics, such as the Affordable Care Act, the opioid epidemic, influenza A, the hepatitis C outbreak, the health dangers of Hurricane Harvey, trauma care during the Las Vegas shootings, safe staffing, rare medical stories, and violence in the workplace.

In 2018, what media topics would you like to see fellow nurses discussing? In the American Nurses Association's Year of Advocacy, I encourage you to be a part of the conversation. ★

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## Quick tips for nurses considering media opportunities

- 1 Identify what topic you'd like to discuss. Review the latest evidence, themes, and research.
- 2 Take a public-speaking, writing, or introduction-to-journalism class to sharpen your communication skills and familiarize yourself with the media landscape.
- 3 Introduce yourself to your local TV and radio stations and newspapers as a nurse interested in being a content expert.
- 4 Join the Association of Health Care Journalists for access to learning and networking opportunities with journalists interested in health.