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Canadian Breast Cancer Network
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Metastatic Breast Cancer Story-Telling Toolkit

Introduction to the Toolkit

The contents of this toolkit are designed to help you share your story and to increase the profile of metastatic breast cancer within the Canadian media landscape.

These materials have been prepared as a guide on how to share your experience living with metastatic breast cancer, detail the progress that has been made so far, and highlight the opportunities to improve the quality of life for Canadians living with metastatic breast cancer.

Inside, you will find the following documents for your reference:

- Blog Writing Tips
- How To Write a Letter to the Editor Guide
- How To Write a Letter to MPs and MPPs Guide
- Media Relations Preparedness Guide
- How To Write a Media Pitch Note
- Social Media Guidelines

Should you have any questions or require any clarification, please contact the CBCN at cbcn@cbcn.ca.

Blog Writing Tips

As part of your advocacy activities, you may want to consider starting a [blog](#) dedicated to your journey. Whether it's sharing your story, connecting with like-minded individuals, or simply learning more about the online space, blogging can be a meaningful way to contribute your ideas and share your experience with others.

Whether you already have a blog or contemplate launching one, here are a few tips and ideas that you may find helpful:

- **Keep It Simple** – When starting a blog, don't try to make it perfect or be overly critical of yourself and your writing, or the way your blog looks. The idea is to get started and become familiar with your blogging platform – and see where your blogging journey takes you.
- **Be Yourself** – Find your voice, and let your personality come through. Every person's expression is unique, and your website is your space to create and share your story in the exact way that you like.
- **A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words** – If possible, try to include visuals. Are you an aspiring photographer? Has your son or daughter snapped a funny picture of you? Have you found an image with a quote that precisely describes how you feel? Images evoke emotions and enrich text-based content. Check out [Pinterest](#) or [Flickr](#) for inspiration and remember to credit the source. Never use copyrighted work without obtaining prior permission of the copyright holder. Many websites will describe the use visitors are (or are not) permitted to make of the content. The use permission can generally be verified under "Terms of Use" or "Terms and Conditions".

Blog Writing Tips (cont'd)

- ***Inspiration is Everywhere*** – Have fun and explore various topics. What are your hobbies? Which places have you visited recently? What is your advice to others that might find themselves in a similar situation? How did you cope with your circumstances? What inspires you? Using everyday moments to express and share your story will make your blog unique and authentic.
- ***Make Friends*** – Blogosphere is all about connecting with others. It's likely that your readers will comment on your posts and ask you questions – they will love to hear back from you.
- ***Learn from Others*** – Bookmark blogs and websites that you like and make a note of their writers' styles and overall approaches. Different ways of relaying information and varying writing styles might inspire you to try new things and keep your content fresh.
- ***Sharing is Caring*** – Whether linking to news stories, updates from the organizations and groups that you care about, or blog posts by others, leverage relevant information available at your fingertips as a source for conversation.
- ***Create Your Own Social Media Imprint*** – If you are on Facebook or Twitter, feel free to include a link to your blog in your profile description and share new posts with your friends, family or followers.

Letter to the Editor Template and Guide

As part of your advocacy activities, you might consider sending a letter to the editor – a letter sent to a publication about issues of concern from a reader. Oftentimes, the letter comes from a point of opposition or correcting a perceived error read in a previous edition of the publication, or in support of a stance taken by a journalist. It might also come when the particular topic is current/relevant. Good examples of this are when the topic is up for debate by a branch of government, or a high-profile story has gained lots of media attention. These letters are meant to be published verbatim, so anything you write must be accurate and appropriate for the publication's audience.

Quick Tips:

- To submit a letter to the editor, copy and paste the finalized text into the body of an email (do not submit as an attachment).
- Letters should be kept as short, clear and concise as possible. Prior to submission, it is important to confirm the preferred length/word count through the newspaper's website. For instance, *The Globe and Mail* requires that all letters include fewer than 150 words to be considered.
- While newspapers welcome letters on any subject, they do reserve the right to condense and edit at their discretion.
- Where possible, localize the content to increase chances of pick-up by the regional newspapers.
- To source the email address of the editor, go to the 'contact us' tab on the outlet's website. This ensures you have the appropriate contact who has given their permission to be contacted.

Letter to the Editor Template and Guide (cont'd)

Below, please find a sample letter to the editor, based on someone living with metastatic breast cancer. The stance in this situation is to inform the editor and readers that survivorship breast cancer and metastatic breast cancer are different, and the views of those living with metastatic breast cancer are often overlooked.

Word Count: [insert number of words]

[Insert your name], [insert your title], [indicate the organization you represent, if appropriate to the letter]

Address: [insert address/email address at your discretion]

Daytime Phone Number: [insert number, in case any follow-up is requested at your discretion]

Subject Line Example:

Letter to the Editor: Metastatic Breast Cancer Patients Need to be Acknowledged

Body:

Dear Editor,

[Timely angle] Over the years, Breast Cancer Awareness Month has garnered much media attention, and that is to be commended. It is important to recognize this terrible disease and bring to light new information about treatments and supports for those living with it. However, too often the messaging around breast cancer is focused solely on the “survivorship” aspect of the disease, and not on women like me, living with metastatic breast cancer.

Letter to the Editor Template and Guide (cont'd)

[Insight/point of clarification] Advocates have been calling on the Canadian government to establish October 13th as Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day – an opportune time to educate people on our unique journeys with this late-stage disease. Though this is not an officially recognized day, it is noted around the world and among some breast cancer patient associations in Canada.

[Include details about a project being carried out by CBCN or by individuals that showcases the lives and impact of women living with metastatic breast cancer.]

[Action/repeat the lesson or reason for letter] I encourage all readers to visit the Canadian Breast Cancer Network's website (www.cbcn.ca) to learn more about this activity, how they can get involved and also to educate themselves on metastatic breast cancer. Those of us living with this late-stage disease can often feel isolated from the greater breast cancer community and feel that the breast cancer information currently available does not address our unique needs.

Letter to MPs/MPPs Template

A standard advocacy tool, writing a letter is also very popular for its convenience factor. Letters can be mailed or sent via email (only if the email address is posted on the recipient's official webpage). Below is a sample letter that can be sent to your local MPP or MP. Encourage your friends and family to follow suit and send a letter as well.

[Name of MP/MPP/Party Leader]
[Street Address]
[City/Town, Postal Code]

[Date]

Dear [Mr./Ms./Mrs.] [Surname],

As a constituent in your riding, I am writing to you to share my concerns as a woman living with metastatic breast cancer. Through my personal experience living with metastatic breast cancer, it is often common to feel isolated from the general breast cancer community. Many women living with a metastatic breast cancer diagnosis feel that the breast cancer information currently available simply does not address our unique needs. No matter where you are located in [province/Canada], it is important for women living with metastatic breast cancer to feel supported and connected to a network of people who are facing similar challenges, especially as we try to better understand our diagnosis and access diverse treatment options.

Letter to MPs/MPPs Template (cont'd)

A few important facts about metastatic breast cancer:

- Advanced or metastatic breast cancer occurs when the cancer has spread to other parts of the body – most commonly, the bones, liver, lungs and brain.ⁱ Metastatic breast cancer is currently considered an incurable disease, though there are many treatments that can help to control disease progression.ⁱⁱ
- Every year, approximately 25,500 Canadians are diagnosed with breast cancer.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Approximately 30 per cent of those initially diagnosed with earlier stages of breast cancer later develop recurrent and/or metastatic disease.^{iv}
- At least three Canadian women receive their first breast cancer diagnosis of locally advanced or metastatic disease every day.^v

[Insert your personal story here. E.g. “I am a working mother of two children living with metastatic breast cancer. This means that...”]

Advocates from across [province/Canada] have called on the government to recognize October 13th of every year as Metastatic Breast Cancer Awareness Day in Canada, a day intended to support and honour women living with metastatic breast cancer all across the world.

I call on you to commit to... [Insert the desired course of action] and stand in solidarity with Canadian families affected by metastatic breast cancer.

Letter to MPs/MPPs Template (cont'd)

Thank you for your commitment, and I look forward to receiving a response from you.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Address (City, Province, Postal Code)]

[Email]

[Phone Number]

ⁱCanadian Cancer Society. Metastatic cancer overview. Available at: <https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-type/metastatic-cancer/metastatic-cancer/?region=on>. Accessed April 14, 2015.

ⁱⁱCanadian Breast Cancer Network. Metastatic Breast Cancer in Canada Report. Available at: http://www.cbcn.ca/documents/cbcn_special_reports/MBCIC-Report.pdf. Accessed April 14, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱCancer Research Society. Breast Cancer. Available at: <http://www.crs-src.ca/research-breast-cancer>. Accessed April 14, 2015.

^{iv}Canadian Breast Cancer Network. Metastatic Breast Cancer in Canada Report. Available at: http://www.cbcn.ca/documents/cbcn_special_reports/MBCIC-Report.pdf. Accessed April 14, 2015.

^vCanadian Partnership Against Cancer. The 2014 Cancer System Performance Report, March 2014. Available at http://www.cancerview.ca/idc/groups/public/documents/webcontent/sp_report_2014.pdf. Accessed April 14, 2015.

Media Relations Preparedness Guide

Speaking with media for the first time can be daunting, but preparation can alleviate much of the on-the-spot stress of conveying your message to an audience. Below you will find expert tips on how to prepare for an interview to ensure nothing can distract from your important story.

What Makes a News Story?

Newsrooms are constantly inundated by interest groups, companies and organizations of all kinds in search of media coverage. Beyond the five W's – Who, What, When, Where and Why – news stories are chosen according to the following criteria:

- Audience impact
- Newsworthiness
- Controversy
- Conflict
- Credibility and public awareness of players involved
- Emotional impact

Interview Objectives

Interviewer – to satisfy their readers, listeners or viewers. They must offer the audience an interesting and entertaining or informative story. The story will vary according to each interviewer's target audience.

Interviewee/Spokesperson – to get the message across on behalf of your business, objective or organization. This message must be expressed in a style that reflects the image your cause wishes to convey.

Audience – wants to be informed and entertained. Really, the crucial step is to get their attention. Think about who the audience is (hint: it's not the reporter!). The audience can include customers, law makers, the general public, the healthcare community, etc.

Media Relations Preparedness Guide (cont'd)

How to Secure an Interview

The best way to start is to reach out to your local media publications/outlets, whether it's a community newspaper, radio, television station or website. Local media tend to be very friendly and love to feature local stories told by those who live in the community.

Typically, contact information can be found on the media websites. If you cannot seem to find a dedicated email or phone number for a specific contact, call the general line and ask to speak with a producer or editor, or other newsroom contact.

Once you connect with a person working on story development, explain why you are calling and share your idea. Try not to feel discouraged if media decline – should this happen, simply ask if there is anyone else who might be interested in your idea, or if there is a better time for this type of story to be featured.

Preparing for the Interview

When asked for an interview, take advantage of having the reporter on the phone at that moment and get the following information:

- Name of the reporter and outlet
- Deadline (date, time) for completing the story
- Details on the topic, desired angle
- Names of people to be interviewed (is it just you, or are there other interviewees/angles?)
- Length of the interview
- Live or taped interview (if television or radio)

Media Relations Preparedness Guide (cont'd)

Ensure you know your story. You should focus your comments on three key messages, which should sum up the essence of what you want to convey to the public. It should be simple, short, straightforward, convincing, colourful and easy to remember.

Quick tips: Make sure you rehearse and check any details or statistics you might use, so that you have documented references you can share if needed.

Phone Interviews

If you have a radio or print interview taking place over the phone, keep your notes in front of you for easy access to information; however, be sure to not get distracted by them or other things around you. Make sure you still dress for the interview, and if possible, stand during the call. This will subconsciously encourage you to stay alert and professional throughout the whole interview. Don't get sucked into the conversational nature of phone calls and make sure to continually refer to your key messages!

Different Types of Messages

Radio – keep your messages short and concise. There is no room for detail or long-winded answers, as radio often works in “sound bites”. Use your words to create the visual imagery for the listener, such as active verbs or anecdotes. Be articulate and make your voice sound pleasant to listen to.

Television – visuals are king (or queen!), and the interviewer will likely want to tape in a location that supports the message (e.g. your home, etc.). If it is in your home, choose a room ahead of time and prepare it for the interview. Ensure there is no clutter, no brand or company logos and nothing distracting in the background.

Media Relations Preparedness Guide (cont'd)

A family photo on a shelf is a good background visual (to the extent that you and each member of your family appearing on the picture are prepared to share this picture with media and potentially the general public).

Make sure to look at the interviewer, not the camera. Sit up straight, lean slightly forward, if possible, to show you are engaged in the interview. Be yourself, as any artificial persona will show through on camera. Avoid fidgeting or any nervous movement, as this can be distracting to the audience.

Dress conservatively, professionally and comfortably, but avoid wearing all black, all white or small patterns. Women should wear pants or longer skirts, keeping in mind that many interviews will be seated. Ask ahead if the reporter would want to film any clips outside, so you can prepare for poor weather or wind.

Print – back in the heyday of print media, there were beat reporters who specialized in certain areas of interest, such as a health policy reporter, a medical reporter, or a family lifestyle reporter, among others. With newsrooms such as they are now, there are no longer specialized reporters. Ensure you explain things thoroughly in clear language. The great news is that with print reporters, you have the freedom to explain any specific terms and expand on a given topic as needed.

Final Thoughts

- There is no such thing as “off the record”. Don’t share anything that you would not want to read or hear in public.
- Treat the media nicely and attempt to build relationships.
- Turn negatives into positives at all opportunities.
- You can take control of the interview or re-contextualize if need be.

Media Relations Preparedness Guide (cont'd)

- Emphasize your key messages. Try not to stray from them.
- Don't answer questions if they are meant for someone else. If you are not a doctor, don't give medical advice. Instead, say, "That is a great question. The best person to answer that would be an oncologist, not me."
- Prepare to answer when the reporter says, "Is there anything else you wish to add?" This is an excellent opportunity to reinforce your key messages.
- If you have further questions, feel free to reach out to your contact at the Canadian Breast Cancer Network (CBCN).

Good luck!

Media Pitch Note Sample

Introduction

A pitch note is meant to inform local media about your story. In a pitch note, you want to share your message in a way that can illustrate to the reporter how the story might unfold for their audience. Local media like to share compelling stories about the people in their community, like you. The pitch note is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the reporter, tell your story and explain why it's important that they highlight the subject. A good idea would be to mention local support provided and supplement with some Canadian or local facts to help illustrate the story.

Having an angle is also an effective tool to encourage media to engage in your story. It brings a timely aspect to a story that might be seen as a softer media story.

Quick tips:

- Don't overwhelm with too much detail. The pitch note should be about half of a page to one page long, maximum.
- Have a high-resolution colour photo available to share if someone asks for it. This photo could be of you – on your own or with your family and/or friends, providing you have received advance permission from the individual(s) to use and share the photo. Make sure that there are no visible brand or company logos, and the photo background is not cluttered.
- Only send out a pitch letter to local media if you know you will be in town to conduct interviews. They might want to do an in-person interview or send a photographer to take their own photos.
- Reference relevant statistics where possible to show where the information comes from. Media can potentially use them as research points for any feature or more in-depth stories.

Media Pitch Note Sample (cont'd)

- References can provide credibility to the content of the letter; however, linking to another website requires the consent of that organization.
- If you include photos, ensure you ask permission from individuals in the photos, or seek permission if the photo is copyrighted. Always provide a photo credit to the photographer.

Below, please find a sample pitch note, based on someone living with metastatic breast cancer. This note illustrates how “Kelly” would share her story with local media via email, with the goal of informing her community about metastatic breast cancer, its impact on her life, and why it’s important to highlight the unique needs of those affected.

Subject Line Example: *New year, new hope for local woman living with metastatic breast cancer*

Body:

Hello [insert name of reporter or use more general “editor” or “producer”],

[Timely news hook example/upfront] Monday, February 4th, is World Cancer Day, a critically important day to focus on those living with this devastating disease and share relevant information with your [readers/viewers].

For most Canadians, New Year’s resolutions involve personal health improvement goals, such as eating better or exercising more. Now nearing the end of January, for many of those Canadians, these resolutions are already slipping or being forgotten altogether.

Media Pitch Note Sample (cont'd)

But for women living with metastatic breast cancer, like me, eating well and exercising is not just a New Year's resolution – it's integral to prolonging my survival.

[Facts and statistics] Every year, approximately 25,500 Canadians are diagnosed with breast cancer.ⁱ At least three Canadian women receive their first breast cancer diagnosis of locally advanced or metastatic disease every day.ⁱⁱ Approximately 30 per cent of those initially diagnosed with earlier stages of breast cancer later develop recurrent and/or metastatic disease.ⁱⁱⁱ

[Personal angle example] Now 54 years old, I was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer (Stage IV) in June 2010. As a mother and a new grandmother, I look forward to spending as much time with my loved ones as possible. And this summer, I'll be traveling across the U.S. and Canada with my family, visiting iconic landmarks I've never seen before – like Niagara Falls.

[Personal message example] For women like me, 2015 brings new hope. New treatments are available to help extend the number of sunrises, road trips, laughs and hugs with family members – an important New Year's resolution to keep. Highlighting our stories is vital for the continued education of the Canadian public, given that metastatic breast cancer is rarely discussed within the noisy background of the larger breast cancer movement.

[Contact for interview] I would gladly share more information about this important cause with you. Please advise if you would be interested in discussing this further and arrange an interview to share my story – to support others affected by metastatic breast cancer and raise awareness of our unique needs.

Media Pitch Note Sample (cont'd)

Best regards,
Kelly, Vancouver
[Phone number]

ⁱCancer Research Society. Breast Cancer. Available at: <http://www.crs-src.ca/research-breast-cancer>. Accessed April 14, 2015.

ⁱⁱCanadian Partnership Against Cancer. The 2014 Cancer System Performance Report, March 2014. Available at http://www.cancerview.ca/idc/groups/public/documents/webcontent/sp_report_2014.pdf. Accessed April 14, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱCanadian Breast Cancer Network. Metastatic Breast Cancer in Canada Report. Available at: http://www.cbcn.ca/documents/cbcn_special_reports/MBCIC-Report.pdf. Accessed April 14, 2015.

Social Media Guidelines

The following tips and guidelines provide an overview of the types of posts and techniques that will help you connect with other social media users, extending the reach of your story, and help inspire a discussion.

Typically, the following topics in posts should be avoided:

- If your posts are product-related;
- If your posts include profanity, defamatory, libellous, offensive, abusive, discriminatory or demeaning content (including images, videos and links);
- If your posts are disparaging, threatening, condone violence or illegal behaviour;
- If your posts are off-topic;
- If your posts offer health or medical advice;
- If your posts contain any personal information such as your email address or phone number;
- If your posts violate another's copyright or intellectual property;
- If your posts are commercial, e.g. sell products and services, or recruit fans and followers;
- If your posts are excessively repetitive and/or disruptive to the community or are spam;
- If your posts contain proprietary, confidential, sensitive, or non-public information

Facebook

1. **Include images** – Posts accompanied by visuals get the highest amount of engagement on Facebook, so be sure to include images whenever you can. Ensure you ask permission from individuals in the photos, or seek permission if the photo is copyrighted. Always provide a photo credit to the photographer.

Social Media Guidelines (cont'd)

2. **Make your posts mobile friendly** – Ensure that your posts are succinct and easy to read. Remember that 70 per cent of your readers access your posts on their smartphones.
3. **Engage with others** – Aim to comment and respond to those who take time to “like” or remark on your published content.
4. **Consider timing** – If your goal is to attract more attention to your posts, experiment with their timing and publish when most Facebook users in your time zone are online. Generally, 1 p.m. is the best time to get most shares; 3 p.m. posts tend to receive most “likes”; and to speak more broadly, posting between 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. results in most engagement. However, the quality and nature of your posts matter most.
5. **Leverage tags and hashtags** – Incorporate tags when mentioning organizations or influencers (e.g. media) in your posts. This will help your content to get noticed, which is important, especially if you include a call to action.

Twitter

1. **Inspire action** – Give a clear call to action, ask a question or request that your followers retweet your posts. Specific requests result in action and, therefore, impact.
2. **Think real estate** – Keep your messages succinct given that you only have 140 characters to play with. Sacrificing grammar is often acceptable in the Twitterverse for that same reason. Don't forget to leave 20 characters, so other Twitter users can add content or comments in their retweets of your posts.
3. **Share Twitter love** – Engage with content that others post: retweet, comment, and reply to help extending the reach of those messages that matter to you and your audience.

Social Media Guidelines (cont'd)

4. **Tag and mention** – Aim to use @ mentions to prompt influencers to engage with you and be sure to respond if they do.
5. **Think visually** – Just like on Facebook, try to include images or videos whenever possible to help your content get noticed. Again, ensure you ask permission from individuals in the photos, or seek permission if the photo is copyrighted. Always provide a photo credit to the photographer.

Instagram

1. **Connect your social networks** – For easy posting of your content across your social networks, connect your Instagram account to your Facebook and Twitter pages. This will also help your followers find you on those platforms.
2. **It's not just about photos** – Did you know? Instagram also allows posting videos that are up to 15 seconds long. Experiment with this fun feature and add some variety to your content.
3. **Follow back** – Follow your followers back and get to know them. Also, find organizations and influencers whose content you enjoy and learn from them.
4. **Incorporate tags and mentions** – Just like on other social networks, hashtags and mentions help driving conversations and encourage interaction.
5. **Find your style** – Explore various filters and tools available within Instagram and practice applying your new editing techniques.

Pinterest

1. **Include descriptions** – Add brief explanations to your posts to tell your followers why each pin is interesting to you. Sharing your point of view encourages conversation and results in re-pins.
2. **Follow and interact** – Find pinners that match your aesthetic by scrolling down on pins that you enjoy and exploring related topics and boards.

Social Media Guidelines (cont'd)

- 3. Update your boards regularly** – Make sure that you review your board collection regularly and adjust names and descriptions as you see fit, so your content is up-to-date, and you continue enjoying (and using!) the platform.
- 4. Link to sources** – Whenever you pin content, attempt to incorporate links to help others access the original source of information (e.g. infographic publisher or research source).
- 5. Explore the video function** – In addition to images, Pinterest allows pinning videos. This means you can post relevant videos on your Pinterest page and share them with your followers and profile visitors. Ensure you ask permission from individuals in the videos, or seek permission if the video is copyrighted.



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