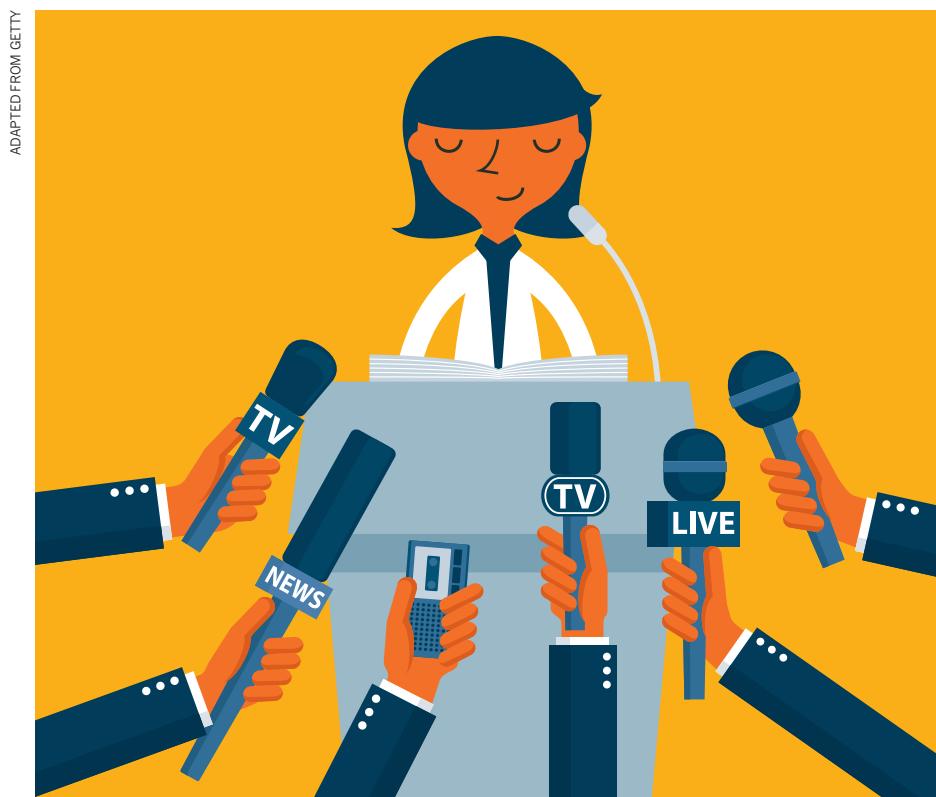


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government pivoted to include scientific impact in its assessment of research quality, the Research Excellence Framework (REF). This prompted a cultural shift in UK universities. Estimated impact now accounts for 20% of quality-related research funding (this will rise to 25% in 2021), and is judged by peer reviewers and end users of research, who seek evidence that the research has reached and substantially influenced the public.

In my role as a lecturer (equivalent to a US assistant professor), I explore problems faced by physicians and other health-care professionals, such as burnout, alcohol abuse, stress and depression, and it is also important for me personally and professionally to know that my research findings might be able to help them.

So in 2014, after the REF change, I attended media-training workshops — one led by a former newspaper journalist and another by two former BBC journalists. Here's what I've learnt about the role of media coverage as an impact driver from these workshops, and from my own outreach experience.

Draft an easy-to-read, attention-grabbing press release. I learnt how to capture the attention of journalists who are inundated with press releases. Journalists need 'new' news, so do not wait until after your study is published to start outreach. Timing is key, so prepare as soon as your work is accepted for publication. Contact your press officer as soon as you have an exciting study accepted for publication, so that they have as much time as possible to work with you on crafting a press release.

When you have a press-release draft ready in advance with core 'take-home' messages that readers — who might not be experts in your field — can easily understand, you can then contact your press officer with news of pending publication as well as a copy of your draft.

The press officer will tell you whether they think that your forthcoming research is newsworthy and, if so, will edit your draft. A final press release is often a collaboration between scientists and press officers, so you will probably exchange a series of drafts. You should check that the final version accurately portrays your research methods and findings (with caveats about the validity, reliability or generalizability of the results) in a way that is accessible to scientists, stakeholders and the general public.

Make sure that the final version is clear on what is new or original about your research, so that your press release captures the sense of breaking news that journalists require. ►

COLUMN

Make your press coverage count

Media interviews can help to boost your impact and connect you with stakeholders, says **Caroline Kamau**.

I used to think of media interviews and other types of outreach not only as great ways to bring science to the public, but also as endeavours that would not be rewarded by academia's 'publish or perish' culture. But in 2014, after a couple of experiences with journalist interviews, I started to think about media coverage as a means of demonstrating impact, as well as a way to help others and inform the public.

Those media interviews were fun, but not items I added to my CV — in part because some of the topics that the media asked me to cover seemed a tad frivolous. In 2007,

for example, a local BBC TV news reporter was doing a story about the Isle of Wight, a gorgeous island off the UK south coast. Locals were upset with visitors for jumping bus-stop queues, and the BBC wanted a psychologist to explain why queue jumping is such a faux pas (my research has involved group behaviour).

I thought of my resultant interview segment as a fun activity — friends sent me jokey texts asking for advice about how not to get queue-jumped at a rugby match — but not as a serious CV entry.

That changed five years ago, when the UK

► **Consider the news cycle's timing and line up potential interviewees in advance.** I have learnt to anticipate journalists' deadlines. Once, in 2015, Channel 5 and ITV (major UK terrestrial channels similar to the BBC) wanted to cover a story about my then-forthcoming study on the effects on people with cancer of receiving advice and information about treatment and outcomes (C. Kamau *BMJ Support. Palliat. Care* 7, 94–87; 2017). But we needed patients to interview within 48 hours.

The study's publication date was the same date that the story would have run on TV. Getting patients and ethical clearance was impossible within 48 hours, so unfortunately the story did not run. *The Times* did cover the story, but I learnt that TV journalists prefer to interview laypersons, rather than only scientists, when they are covering a human-interest story. Have potential interviewees ready for the time window just before the story runs.

Leverage your media coverage for more outreach opportunities. The UK government's recalibration of its REF to include scientific impact has encouraged UK scientists to pursue non-publishable but worthwhile outreach activities such as commercial partnerships, patents and community engagement. Two years ago, a games company read about our research on stress among medical professionals (A. Medisauskaite and C. Kamau *Psycho-oncology* 26, 1732–1740; 2017) in *The Guardian*, and asked us to help them to develop an occupational-health intervention for doctors, nurses and other clinicians.

My then-doctoral student, the games company and I developed an app that is now being trialled in a dozen National Health Service (NHS) hospitals. The games company sparked the interest of the NHS Practitioner Health Programme, a confidential service for doctors and dentists experiencing physical- or mental-health problems that could affect their careers. We jointly created a board game that helps clinicians to cope with those issues.

Australia and Hong Kong have joined the engagement-recognition trend. Australia had its first Engagement and Impact Assessment (EIA) national exercise in 2018, after some pilots. The federal government will use the results to inform its allocation of funding to universities together with results from Excellence in Research for Australia, a national assessment exercise that started in 2010. The EIA recognizes media coverage, commercial licensing, patents, consultancy, public lectures, book sales, open access, social-media metrics and funding from lay organizations.

From 2020, Hong Kong will add impact to its national Research Assessment Exercise

(RAE). Impact will be worth 15%, and Hong Kong's government will use RAE results to allocate money to universities for research. New Zealand's Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) system does not judge impact as a unique category, but it includes a section that judges academics' research contributions. This means that academic scientists can discuss their impact on society within this element of the PBRF.

Maximize the career value of your outreach. Many US universities do not require outreach or public engagement for tenure or promotion, so tenure-track and early-career faculty members should focus on publishing in good

a teaching-focused university, describe how your achievements help to improve student recruitment.

Check what is counted as impact in your country or university. Media coverage alone is not counted as impact in the UK REF, so you need to gather additional data showing that your research has led to changes in public thinking. A great source is Reddit, a popular online discussion forum with science sections. In Australia, media coverage and other forms of knowledge exchange do count towards the EIA.

I have found that media coverage opens up new career opportunities. In 2018, an oncologist invited me to lead a boot-camp session about burnout at the University of Cambridge, UK. One of her oncologist colleagues had requested that burnout be included as a topic in the boot camp sessions, and they contacted me after hearing about my research on BBC Radio 4.

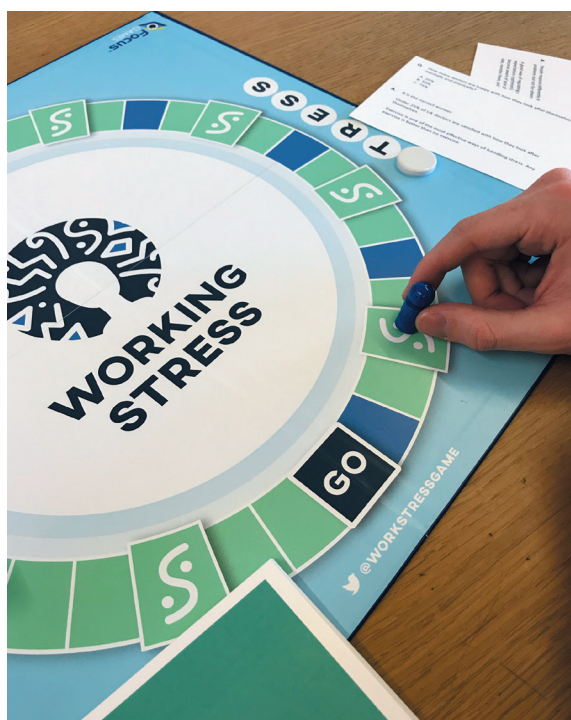
I had not participated in that radio broadcast, but its mention of me and my work prompted the oncologist to contact me. It was a clear illustration of the fact that media coverage helps people who use science to learn about that science — and that the coverage can open doors for you.

At the boot camp, I taught oncologists about the prevalence of burnout, psychiatric morbidity, sleep deprivation, stress and depression in their profession. I had them complete training exercises on how to measure burnout and identify its triggers. Among oncologists, the triggers include patient mortality, the stress of making difficult decisions, managing patients' expectations, coping with highly distressed patients, and the stress of relaying bad news about cancer diagnosis or prognosis. It was a perfect example of how media coverage of my research led to real-life impact.

Getting your research cited in policy documents is another effective way to influence the public's behaviour. Our research was cited in the US National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) clinical-practice guidelines in a section advising oncologists about managing distress. I don't know for sure, but it is certainly possible that the NCCN learnt of our research through the media coverage our team has received.

Your work as a scientist is important. Media coverage of your research is not just a lark — it is a valuable way to conduct outreach, which in turn can help you to make a real, measurable difference in the world. ■

Caroline Kamau is an organizational psychologist at Birkbeck, University of London, and a member of Birkbeck's Centre for Medical Humanities.



Caroline Kamau's board game counted as scientific impact.

journals and winning grants. Impact can be a by-product of your work that does not take time away from publications and grants.

Some universities accept outreach efforts as examples of service or research scholarship, but, overall, you should stick to impact activities that have a low time cost for you — opt for telephone or Skype media interviews rather than travelling to a TV or radio studio. Prioritize activities that open new opportunities for collaboration (for example, data collection and co-publishing) or industry funding.

A few US universities do consider public engagement and outreach in tenure and promotion decisions, or hold competitions rewarding outreach with cash awards. In your application for a job, tenure, promotion or an award, describe your impact activities in a way that fits with your university's culture and goals. In a research-intensive university, describe how your impact achievements support your institution's public profile. In