Writing an Op-Ed/Opinion Piece on Global Surgery

Writing an opinion piece (and successfully publishing it!) is one of the best ways to advocate for global surgery to new audiences. It can build excitement around an event or draw attention to a cause. It is also, unfortunately, one of the most competitive ways to advocate for a cause. This guide will offer a few items to consider before you begin to write, and detail how to pitch your piece once the ink has dried.

**Initial Considerations**
While you probably intuitively know most of these guidelines, it can be helpful to consider the elements below before you begin to pen your masterpiece.

**The Right Person**
Consider the best person within your organization to write a piece – if your communications staff can partner with a well-known figure or someone with hands-on expertise in the subject area, it will lend the piece strength and credibility.

**The Right Time**
Plan your op-ed to coincide with a specific day relevant to your organization or a large event – that will be the “hook” of your piece, and what makes it timely for the outlet.

**A New Perspective**
While we all share a similar message for global surgery, a unique insight, argument, or perspective is key to getting published in competitive outlets and to making an impact. The New York Times, for example, says that it looks for “...timeliness, ingenuity, strength of argument, freshness of opinion, clear writing and newsworthiness.” Striking stories paired with compelling facts are always strong starting points.

**The Technical Details**
- Op-eds can be from 300 – 1800 words – though most hover around 600-750. Check the outlet you’re targeting to see what their preferred length is.
- Many outlets will request exclusivity. Make a submission timeline with a plan for targeting your preferred outlets and your secondary outlets to ensure you’re giving your piece the best chance of success.

**Pitching an Op-Ed**
Outlets generally allow you to submit op-ed pitches via email or via an online submission form.

Assuming you have the flexibility of an email:
1. Start off with a compelling subject line that either outlines your expertise and opinion, or the strong opinion expressed in the op-ed.
2. Then, in two-three short paragraphs, establish your credentials (why you’re an authority), tell the editor why the topic you’re writing on is relevant now, for their publication, and persuade the editor that your topic is widely compelling and interesting.
3. Then, separated slightly from your pitch, put the op-ed text in the body of the email. Put the word count next to the title, in parenthesis.
4. Your contact information – as much as you can.

If you’ve waited past the consideration period of the outlet, or if your piece has a very short period of impact, send a follow-up email thanking the editor and letting them know when you must withdraw your piece and send it to other publications. If they don’t respond, submit your piece to the next outlet on your timeline!

Questions? Comments? Email us at Contact@theg4alliance.org.