

Writing a Letter to the Editor

There are million excuses for not writing or calling the media when you see unfair, biased or inaccurate news coverage on chronic kidney disease: "I don't have time"; "I'm not educated enough"; "Who wants to hear from me?"

Sharing your perspective with the media makes an impact on the public. If newspaper/journals get letters from a dozen people raising the same issue, they will most likely publish one or two of them. So even if your letter doesn't get into print, it may help another one with a similar point of view get published.

Here are a few tips for writing a Letter to the Editor:

1. Put your full first and last name, address, phone and/or fax numbers (day and evening) and your e-mail address at the top of the letter. Most publications will want to call the writer to confirm authenticity: (i.e. that you are using your correct name -- not a phony name -- and that you did in fact write the letter). Always sign your letters as an individual or representative of a community group.
2. If you are referring to a previously published letter, a news story or column, identify it by its headline and the date it was published (Re: Kidney Transplant Goes Awry, Aug. 27). This enables the editor to quickly check the original item to verify any references you have made to it (i.e. quotes, statistics, etc.).
3. Cut to the chase. You don't need a long, rambling introduction to your subject. Just focus on one or two key points that you want to make and then get out.
4. Write short, punchy sentences, grouped in two or three paragraphs.
5. If you are responding to a columnist's views (or any other opinion piece), don't launch a personal attack on the columnist -- attack his/her views. Offer a countervailing opinion. Try to advance the debate so that other readers might join in the discussion in subsequent letters.
6. If you have read a news story or feature article that relates to something you've experienced, respond by putting your own personal twist on the subject.
7. Don't send copies of your letter to a whole host of publications. Make it an original to the publication you really want to publish it. If you don't get a confirmation call within a week to 10 days, then try submitting it elsewhere.
8. Make one point (or at most two) in your letter. State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
9. Don't be greedy. If your letter is published, wait at least a month before submitting another one. Letters editors want to give as many people as possible a chance to comment on the issues.
10. Monitor the paper for your letter. If your letter has not appeared within a week or two, follow up with a call to the editorial department of the newspaper.