

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR RADIATION ONCOLOGY

ASTRO Interview Guide



ASTRO
TARGETING CANCER CARE

Key Information about ASTRO

- ASTRO was founded in 1958, more than 50 years ago, and is the premier radiation oncology society in the world, with more than 10,000 members who treat cancer patients with radiation therapies.
- Nearly every practicing radiation oncologist in the U.S. is an ASTRO member, and many ASTRO members are from around the world.
- ASTRO members include oncologists from all disciplines, medical physicists, dosimetrists, radiation therapists, radiation oncology nurses and nurse practitioners, biologists, physician assistants, practice administrators and industry representatives from around the world.
- ASTRO provides extensive education opportunities to keep members up-to-date with the latest research and technology to assist in the fight against cancer.
- ASTRO provides competitive grants for gifted researchers to advance cancer treatment.
- ASTRO provides many online resources and information—for members and the public at www.astro.org, and specifically for patients at www.rtanswers.org.

Your affiliation with ASTRO, your standing in the radiation oncology community and your professional experience make you an ideal ASTRO spokesperson.

The following pages contain a few of ASTRO's key institutional messages and radiation treatment statistics, which you may want to consider integrating into your interviews.

If you receive a call directly from a reporter, please call ASTRO's Press Office to coordinate and to ensure that you have the latest ASTRO data and messages.



Key Information about Radiation Treatment

- Radiation has been a safe and effective cancer treatment for more than 100 years.
- Nearly two-thirds of all cancer patients are treated with radiation therapy – more than one million cancer patients each year.
- Radiation therapy works by damaging the DNA within cancer cells so that they cannot repair or reproduce. New technology and improved techniques allow us to better target radiation to eliminate cancer cells while protecting healthy cells, thereby reducing side effects while better controlling the cancer.
- Radiation treatment does not hurt; it is similar to getting an X-ray.
- Most of the side effects of radiation therapy are only in the area being treated. For example, a breast cancer patient may notice skin irritation on their breast, like a mild to moderate sunburn, while a patient with cancer in the mouth may experience soreness when swallowing. (If appropriate, explain that these side effects are not the same as those due to chemotherapy—hair loss, nausea, weakness and/or weight loss.)
- The quality of life of our patients is important, so treatment plans are individually tailored for each patient’s personal needs and stage of their life.
- Radiation therapy is less invasive than many other cancer treatments, making it a good option for men and women, young and old, who want to maintain their lifestyles and careers while receiving treatments.
- Radiation therapy may be prescribed in conjunction with other treatments, including chemotherapy and/or surgery. In addition, radiation treatment may be recommended to reduce the symptoms caused by growing tumors and to improve quality of life.

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Preparing for an Interview

ASTRO’s Press Office will provide the necessary background materials for each interview including:

- Key issues/questions to expect in the interview.
- Guidance on ASTRO’s position on the issue(s).
- Background on the specific reporter and their news outlet so you may be better prepared for the interview. (The ASTRO Press Office will provide the reporter with the correct spelling of your name, your affiliation with ASTRO and your bio and photo, if ASTRO has them on file.)

You should:

- Review materials sent to you by ASTRO’s Press Office.
- Decide on three main points to be emphasized in the interview.
- Be clear on the logistics of the interview: date, time, location or who will call whom, and phone numbers and/or email addresses.

For Television Interviews

- Solid colors without busy patterns work best. (Avoid stripes, houndstooth, tweed or checked patterns.)
- Look at and speak directly to the reporter, not the camera.
- Keep a pleasant expression; smile when appropriate. A “neutral” face can appear unhappy or angry on-camera.
- Speak and gesture naturally, but avoid dramatic movements.
- Hold your “on-camera persona” until the interview is completely over and the cameras and microphones are off.



Interview Tips

**Remember:
THE MICROPHONE
IS ALWAYS ON!**

- **There is no such thing as “off-the-record.”** Remember that every comment you make before, during and after the interview (including any telephone or email exchanges) is a quote waiting to happen.
- **Determine in advance the main messages** you would like to convey in the interview.
- **Identify at least three examples/facts** to support your main messages.
- **Speak in headlines** – start with your conclusion and then support it with facts. Aim for no more than 30 words per response.
- **Remember who the final audience will be** for the reporter’s story. Use everyday words rather than complex medical terminology.
- The public wants to know that a **physician is guiding their treatment**, not a device or computer.
- **Always frame your reply as a positive statement.** Never repeat a reporter’s negative statements.
- **Don’t know the answer? Don’t fake it.** In this situation, the best response is, “I don’t know.” Offer to find out and get back to them with the information. ASTRO’s Press Office is happy to assist with follow-up, if appropriate.
- **Answer the question asked briefly**, and quickly transition to one of your main messages.
- When faced with a difficult or controversial question, **the best strategy is to comment without commenting** – briefly explain why you can’t answer the question, i.e. “I do not have first-hand knowledge of this study, therefore...” or “That’s unclear at this point, but here’s what we do know...” (and stick to the facts). Avoid saying “No comment,” unless there is a legal reason.

After an interview

As soon as possible after an interview, you should:

- **Conduct a mental review of the interview:** Did you answer the reporter’s questions? Did you communicate your key messages? Did you promise to follow-up on anything? (If so, ASTRO’s Press Office is available to assist you.)
- Call or email ASTRO’s Press Office with feedback on the interview and to seek assistance with follow-up, if needed.

Conduct a mental review of the interview:
Did you answer the reporter’s questions?
Is there any follow-up needed?

Reach out to **ASTRO’s Press Office** at any time for assistance:

Michelle Kirkwood
Media Relations Manager
Phone: 703-286-1600
Email: press@astro.org



ASTRO is dedicated to
improving patient care
through education,
clinical practice,
advancement of science
and advocacy.

ASTRO

TARGETING CANCER CARE

www.astro.org

www.rtanswers.org

8280 Willow Oaks Corporate Drive

Suite 500

Fairfax, VA 22031

1-800-962-7876