



CHD Awareness Week: February 7 – 14, 2010

How You Can Raise Awareness of CHDs

CHD Awareness Week is an annual awareness effort to help educate the public about congenital heart defects, the number-one birth defect that affects approximately one in every 125 babies every year in the United States alone.

As someone who has been personally impacted by congenital heart defects, you are in a unique position to help generate awareness – and make a significant impact on a number of critical audiences, including other families in your shoes. One of the most effective ways you can help raise awareness is by sharing your story with your local newspapers – or even TV and radio stations. This guide is designed to help you do that.

Your Public Relations Toolkit

This Little Hearts PR Toolkit walks you through the entire process of preparing your story and pitching it to your local media. Your hometown newspaper and other media outlets *need* a local angle to their stories – and they *want* compelling stories like yours...stories that can effect change.

Here are a few easy steps to reaching out to your local media.

Newspapers

Pitch your story to your local daily/weekly newspaper. The newspaper lists contacts in the newspaper itself – or you can look at the paper's website. Send an email pitch to the newspaper – both to the features editor/reporter and the health/medicine editor/reporter, as either one may be interested. In some cases (particularly with smaller market newspapers and weekly papers), there may be only one news editor. You can pitch your story to that individual.

Television

The TV station in your local market also may be interested in your story. Go to the station's website and find a contact name for the assignment editor or assignment desk. The station might list a name – or just a general email and/or phone number. If you are calling, be sure **NOT** to call just before a news show is scheduled to air. Morning is typically best. **NOTE:** TV stations will want to talk with you (and at least tape your child, if possible) on camera should they opt to do a story.



Radio

If your local radio station has a call-in show, they often like to do interviews around “events” like CHD Awareness Week. You could contact the radio station and offer to come on the air and tell your story, with a pitch to the listeners to donate to Little Hearts as an organization that provides support, education and hope to families like yours all around the country.

Materials you need

In this PR Toolkit, we have provided a sample pitch letter you can email or fax to your local media – with a blank section where you can tell your personal story. In the eyes of the media, this is the most compelling part of your pitch. Yours is not only the local angle they need – but the touching angle that will really impact their audience. We also have provided our CHD Fact Sheet to share with the media, which will be very useful information and will help bring perspective to their stories. You can copy and paste both documents right out of this PR Toolkit.

When you land a story

If you are successful in securing a story around CHD Awareness Week, please let us know! You can send a link to any stories that run online to INFO@littlehearts.org



MEDIA PITCH LETTER TEMPLATE

I am writing to gauge your interest in a timely story about the number-one birth defect, and how it has changed the life of one local 4-year-old boy – my son (*insert your info*).

[YOUR PERSONAL STORY HERE – limit it to 50-100 words. See example below.]

Four years ago, we gave birth to our first child – a boy, named Andrew. He was deemed healthy – and we went to sleep that night feeling blessed. But the next morning, Andrew's short life took a sharp turn. He was diagnosed with several congenital heart defects. In critical condition, he underwent two open-heart surgeries when he was just three days old. We were beyond scared – and completely blindsided. We thought we'd had a healthy pregnancy. We thought we had a healthy baby. But we didn't – and no one saw it coming.

The problem

The fact is, congenital heart defects are the number-one birth defect – and the leading cause of birth defect-related deaths worldwide. But awareness is low – and that's taking a toll.

- One in every 125 babies is born with a CHD every year in the United States alone.
- CHDs kill twice as many children as childhood cancer.
- Still, pregnant women are not routinely tested – and newborns are not routinely screened – for CHDs. Consequently, they often go undetected until sometime after birth. In some cases, they are detected too late.

Timely angle

CHD Awareness Week is Feb. 7 – Feb. 14. This is an annual awareness effort to help educate the public about congenital heart defects. Participants include individuals, local support groups, national and local organizations and congenital cardiology centers around the world. One such participant is Little Hearts, Inc. I am a member of Little Hearts, which is a national organization that has provided support and education to our family since CHDs changed our lives. I have included more information about the organization below.

Please let me know if you are interested in this story. I think your audience would find it of interest – I hope you agree. You may contact me at (*YOUR CONTACT INFO*).

About Little Hearts, Inc.

Little Hearts, Inc., is a national organization providing support, education, resources, networking and hope to families affected by congenital heart defects – the number-one birth defect. Approximately 40,000 babies are born each year in the United States with a CHD – about one out of every 125 babies. Founded in 1998 by Lenore Cameron after her son was born with a CHD, Little Hearts serves families nationwide who currently have or are expecting a child with a CHD. For more information, visit www.littlehearts.org.



CHD FACTS

- Congenital heart defects (CHDs) occur when a baby's heart fails to form properly during early pregnancy. In most cases, the cause is unknown, although scientists feel both genetic and environmental factors play a role.
- Some environmental factors that increase the risk of CHDs include the mother's use of cocaine, alcohol or certain medications while pregnant. Some maternal medical conditions – such as diabetes – may also increase risk.
- CHDs are the most common birth defect – and the leading cause of birth defect-related deaths.
- CHDs occur more often than Spina Bifida, Down Syndrome or hearing loss – and kill twice as many children as childhood cancer.
- It is estimated that 40,000 babies with CHDs are born in the United States each year – that's one in every 125 babies.
- Although some babies will be diagnosed at birth, newborns are not routinely screened for CHDs – and pregnant women are not routinely tested for CHDs.
- There are approximately 35 different types of congenital heart defects.
- Some CHDs may be treated with surgery, medicine and/or devices, such as artificial valves and pacemakers. In the last 25 years, advances in the treatment of heart defects have enabled half a million U.S. children with serious CHDs to survive into adulthood.
- Many cases of sudden cardiac death in young athletes are caused by undiagnosed CHDs and childhood-onset heart disease.
- Early detection is critical to the successful treatment of CHDs. Some heart defects can be detected by a routine ultrasound – but the most effective prenatal test is an echocardiogram performed by a Pediatric Cardiologist.