In emergencies, the communications media have a crucial role to play in covering incidents and we have to know how to correctly exploit them. Credibility and reliability must be maintained as much as is possible within the inevitable constraints of secrecy, field security, and so on.

The media’s role may be central but we must not make the mistake of inferring from that that in emergencies the media become part of the system. The media are a vital vehicle for transferring information but, even in emergencies, they will remain totally independent, capable of filtering information, voicing criticism, preferring their own sources, and so on.

Our job is to find the common ground between the establishment and the media. When any incident occurs, conventional, biological, or otherwise, the media have a crucial role to play in getting our message across to the general public; if we add that a large section of the public will be sitting at home, the media’s role is second to none.

When the public is suddenly exposed to a type of incident it has not met before, any lack of information can cause hysteria, precisely because of the public ignorance of the nature of this type of incident. Communication nowadays is a 24-hour-a-day affair, constantly available in the kitchen, the car, at the workplace, and at home. Especially if people are sitting shut inside a sealed room their only channel to the outside world is the radio or television. This shows us that the communications media in Israel fill more than just a public relations or public educational function (although this role in itself is of no small importance): they are also needed for getting messages, instruction, and guidance to the public.

The establishment can make use of the media in a number of ways and for a number of purposes:

1. **To instruct**: In times of emergency the public is hungry for instruction. How to act? What should or should not be done? Where can we get vaccination/gas masks/Lugol pills, etc.
2. **To educate and inform:** The public have an endless appetite for information about the topic of the day. If it is a disease, – Where can we get vaccinated? Who should be vaccinated and who should not? So on and so forth.

3. **To get the message across:** Professionals from a variety of fields, briefed by the system, can be offered as expert commentators to the various media.

4. **Talking down anxiety:** Professionals can be put up to reduce the new situation to its proper proportions. The media must be given access to information. Information should be released in real time and must be credible, up to date and appropriate to the communications medium using it (print or electronic).

   1. **Useful Tools**
      - Press conferences/briefings
      - Communiqués
      - Arranging a media station at the site of the incident
      - Appropriate communications devices (e.g., aerials, microwave technology)
      - Regular updates
      - Appointing a communications liaison officer

   2. **Dangers to be Aware of:**
      - Giving out embarrassing and noncredible information.
      - Giving out boring and unattractive information.
      - Background noises.
      - A harassed, crowded working environment.
      - Not paying attention to scheduled broadcasting times.
      - Showing inappropriate favoritism to certain media.
      - Not keeping up the flow of information – if the supply fails the media will start looking for other, more available sources and there will always be other sources anxious to put out information competing with ours.
      - As soon as a preliminary state of readiness has been announced, set up a “war room,” preferably in the Ministry of Health’s Emergency Services Division.
      - A team of “commentator-pundits” should be put on notice and their “front line” put on stand-by for the first interviews to the media.
      - Subcommittees should begin passing all the relevant information they have to the communications war-room.
      - The director of communications for the incident should discuss with his commentary team whether to begin sending out preliminary mes-