

Communicating with the Media The DFCI Experience

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Taking Care to New Heights Patient Centered Care



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Endless Opportunities

- **Lehman Overdose**
 - 1, 2, 3, 5, 10 year
 - Litigation
 - Disciplinary actions
- **Identity Theft**
- **Stolen medical records**
- **Alternative therapies**
- **Critical incidents and near-misses**
- **“The bar is in a different place for DFCl”**

Critical Questions

What Can We Do Now?

What Happened?

What Is the Notification Process?

What Can We Say?

How Can We Say It?

Who Are We Talking To?

What Can We Do Now?

- Formal Crisis Plan?
 - Get organized
 - Know your audiences and how to reach them
- Communications staff routinely in the loop

What Can We Do Now?

- Engage the media - build relationships and credibility
- Develop relationship between communications and legal
- Imagine the worst

Incident is Discovered

- Communications must be notified immediately as part of core team
- Staff is beginning to hear about the incident / tragedy
- This is top priority now...schedules must change
 - Establish regular meeting time

What Happened?

Learn as much about the incident as possible

- Early information often is incorrect
- Be precise and ask detailed questions
- Get continual updates

What Is the Notification Process?

Determine who knows and how the information is likely to spread

- When is the first public notification?

Expect a media call at any time

- Don't let people minimize the likelihood it will go public

What Can We Say?

Both communications and legal must be flexible

Don't hide—you must engage the process

- Misinformation fills a vacuum - very hard to correct later
- Good information drives out bad
- The first stories frame everything

What Can We Say?

Do not say anything you are not positive about

- Never speculate

Credibility is essential

- Make an emotional connection

Over time, release as much accurate information as you can, considering

How Can We Say It?

Define your essential messages as clearly and concisely as possible

- Continual process
- Find examples and details to tell larger story

Centralize and narrow the flow of information

- Determine who will speak for the institution

How Can We Say It?

- All spokespersons must be briefed and prepared
- Remind all staff to direct outside inquiries to Communications Dept.

All communications must be consistent

- Communications Dept. should review communications to all core audiences

Mobilize your allies

Who Are We Talking To?

Patients, staff, trustees, regulators, supporters (donors, community leaders, local officials), interested parties (insurers, etc.)

Don't let your core constituencies learn everything from the news media – communicate directly

Who Are We Talking To?

Many people want and need to believe in you – make that possible

Use all your tools to provide regular updates

- personal calls, e-mail, fax, web site publications, letters

Internal Communications Critical

- All staff devastated when these events happen
- Need to understand what's going on as staff, consumers, and sources of information
- The “drop a dime” phenomenon
 - Action not visible around immediate incident
 - Frustration over historical issue resolution
 - Organization not “telling the truth”

Essential Messages

Be careful around immediate announcements of:

- Revised policies and procedures
- Disciplined the staff involved

Doesn't play well on the outside

- Too quick to jump
- If so easy, why wasn't it fixed before

Can have significant internal ramifications

- cursory review
- “shedding blood”

Essential Messages

- Hospital apology/regret that incident happened
- Disclosed to the patient/family--- informing and supporting them is priority
- Involvement of Board and leadership
 - understanding why systems failed patient and family
 - steps to prevent a similar occurrence
- Working with appropriate authorities

Essential Messages

- Excellent organization and staff but not perfect
- Everyone is committed to quality care and safety
 - Trustees, leaders, clinicians, and all other patient care staff
- Working hard to minimize the risk of errors
- Celebrate this new era of public accountability

Things To Keep in Mind

Others interested in keeping the story alive

The mushroom effect

People at the top must stay engaged

Long Term Communications

Have a story of improvement to tell

Stay engaged with the press

- keep pumping out the good news
- go around the worst news outlets as much as possible
- reach out to new reporters

Keep updating your core audiences directly

Hold your head high