

GWMH Inquests - Crisis Communications Plan and Protocol

Trimedia is working with Hampshire PCT to establish communications plans ahead of the 2009 GWMH inquests. The plans are designed to ensure that Hampshire PCT is prepared for the likely media and public interest around the inquests and that clear protocols are in place to maintain control of communications and to reassure and protect staff.

October / November / December 2008

Communications preparation should include the drafting of a **holding statement** in case early media enquiries arise. The holding statement is designed to buy a short period of time to draft and approve a more detailed answer to queries whilst still appearing responsive. It will also help to establish communications channels.

A **'fast facts'** sheet should also be prepared to summarise the key messages and history. This will provide important positioning and a synopsis of the facts for journalists who might not be familiar with the detail or who are coming onto the story with little time for research. Images of the hospital should be included in this and digital imagery prepared for television. A timetable for available interview opportunity slots would also be included.

Proactive, positive communications should continue to focus on current services and staff and the communications team will issue regular stories over the coming six months to create a positive background to the inquest stories.

Spokespersons should be identified, agreed and briefed and media training provided for those who have not yet received it. Ideally three spokespersons (min.) to include managerial and clinical representatives and contact from Portsmouth Hospitals Trust should be identified to provide 24 hour cover and specialist expertise. Stuart Knowles should also be available for media interviews as the Trust's legal representative.

Stakeholders should be identified e.g. MPs, councillors and a series of briefing meetings set up to update them ahead of the inquests in 2009. Update briefing sheets collating 2-3 positive stories should be produced and regularly distributed over coming months.

Communications pack including contact details for the Hampshire PCT and Portsmouth Hospitals Trust team should be collated and circulated with clear details of roles, responsibilities and cascade call out details. These should be included in a protocol pack for the entire team (including reception and security staff) which includes the fast facts and holding statement.

The communications team will develop and maintain a list of **key journalists** for inclusion in the packs of those with comms responsibilities.

Security arrangements are to be double checked with a view to preventing media and public access to staff and premises during the inquest period. Security staff should be well briefed and provided with access to team contact details.

Staff briefings should be scheduled for early 2009 and should include a media communications protocol and instructions for directing media enquiries. Reception staff should be included and should also be separately briefed re directing media calls and visits.

2009 Pre-inquests

Hampshire PCT and Trimedia to arrange pre inquest media briefings and to further develop media information and statements in advance which are to be provided to the media in a pre hearing press briefing or a series of 1-2-1s.

We recommend

- Inviting journalists that have run stories in the past to 1-2-1s / small group briefings – depending upon diaries and availability.
- Local and regional media – briefing materials to be distributed establishing the clear points of contact
- Local news agency (e.g. PA)
- Targeted national press correspondents (if appropriate)

Pre inquest media briefings are recommended as the verdict is likely to be delivered at the end of the day when it will be too late to react. Pre prepared statements would be distributed and spokespeople (identified, agreed and briefed in advance) would be on hand to give comment under embargo. A venue for interviews to be sourced at the hospital and the court and a time table for morning interviews at GWMH and afternoon interviews at the court would be agreed.

The communications team should plan and prepare and disseminate as much as possible ahead of the verdict. The verdict is out of our hands as it is with a jury, however we can predict some outcomes and draft releases accordingly (Stuart to advise regarding potential scenarios). However it is crucial not to wait until the verdict is delivered to commence media activity. Stuart would also sign off statements to ensure legal lien is adhered to.

It is also important to maintain a tone sympathetic with the families and reiterating that these incidences happened in the past and practice has changed significantly as a result of modernisations in medical practice and CHI recommendations.

Actions:

- Media statements on inquests and supportive staff statements (to be drafted following sight of coroners evidence) - Trimedia
- Fast Facts to be drafted - Trimedia
- Communications protocol and contact details to be collated – ST to source media protocol and contact details
- Imagery to be produced – ST to source with MG
- 3rd party endorsement statements to be drafted following independent verification of CHI recommendations - Trimedia once 3rd party agreed
- Staff briefing documents to be drafted for current internal staff to ensure they are fully informed and understand protocol - ST
- Staff protocols to be produced for media calls and enquiries – who can comment, who to direct calls to and what to do if they are not available - ST
- Admittance information to be produced for new patients to reassure patients and relatives about current practice and standards of care - Trimedia with Elizabeth Emms
- Ongoing – series of positive, proactive releases and statements to be issued relating to current wards and services - Trimedia

- Key messages to be drafted (supportive and understanding regarding the families, distancing current services from what happened 10 years ago and making use of third party endorsement of uptake of CHI recommendations) - Trimedia
- Operational responsibilities e.g. security - Colin Jones at Estates Management to be established and briefings to take place – Elizabeth Emms
- Proactive briefing meetings with stakeholder organisations and politicians to be set up and positive update communications to be commenced – targets to be agreed at next meeting.

In addition, it is recommended that a **meeting room** at an agreed location (possibly two, depending on the venue for the hearing) should be set aside for the period of the inquests as a team base. This should include fax, phones and PCs with printers as well as a meeting table and access to refreshments.