

Media Relations and Communications

Reviewed Date		Number	<i>PR0101</i>
Revised Date	<i>July 24, 2007</i>	Approved Date	<i>December 1, 1990</i>

Introduction

The local media, including television, radio and newspapers, can play a vital role in health protection and promotion, and disease prevention. The health unit uses this powerful communication tool to provide information and advice about health issues in a way that will enhance the public's ability to make informed health choices and to position the health unit as a credible source of health information. It is also a vital tool for communicating critical health information in the event of a public health emergency. Providing accurate, reliable and timely information in a coordinated and consistent fashion is the key to using this communication tool effectively.

The health unit's Media Coordinator establishes and maintains systems to ensure effective coverage of health issues. The Media Coordinator also facilitates the exchange of information between health unit staff and the media by consulting with staff on media relations and positioning health information for the news audience.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to inform Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit Board of Health members, employees, students and volunteers of the systems and processes the agency has put in place to promote consistency and coordination in all health unit relations and communications with the media.

Legislative Authority

Health Protection and Promotion Act R.S.O. 1990

Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act R.S.O.1990

Personal Health Information Protection Act R.S.O. 2004

Regulated Health Professions Act R.S.O. 1990

Policy Definitions and Interpretation

For the purpose of this policy statement:

“Institution” applies to health care settings and residences including hospitals and long term care settings; schools and educational institutions and establishments such as restaurants and other commercial/industrial/municipal establishments or buildings.

Policy

Communication with, and through, the media will meet agency standards, and be in line with the health unit vision, mission and goals. The Media Coordinator will facilitate the exchange of information between health unit staff and the media to ensure consistency and coordination in health unit media relations.

Identifying information on institutions and individuals and information that is part of a legal investigation is deemed confidential and will not be released to the media unless it is necessary to protect and promote the health of the public. This decision will be made in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officers of Health, or designate.

The Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health, the Service Director or designate will assign staff to interact with the media regarding specific topics and programs and will establish processes for the approval of information to be released to the media. Staff not normally assigned to interact with the media must seek the approval of the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health, their Director or designate before initiating contact with the media or providing information or position statements on behalf of the health unit.

News conferences will be approved by the Medical Officer of Health or designate.

Media communications that are produced for distribution from a coalition will not carry the health unit’s branding and identity except when explicitly approved by senior management (e.g. in a situation where other agency branding may also be added to a coalition’s communications). When health unit staff are involved in communications as partners in a coalition, they will speak on behalf of the coalition, and not on behalf of the health unit.

As a member of the public a health unit employee may wish to make a public statement or send a letter to the editor related to issues of public interest. Employees are not permitted to use their position or title to imply in any way that the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit or the Board of Health supports or condones their comment or statement.

Procedures

1) Media requests for statements or information that is not confidential

Directing the request:

- a) Direct media requests to the Media Coordinator, Corporate Service for follow-up and referral.
- b) If the Media Coordinator is unavailable, direct media requests for health unit position statements to the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health, the appropriate Director, or designate.

- c) If the Media Coordinator is unavailable, direct media requests for information about specific health topics, programs or services to the appropriate Director, Manager or to the staff assigned to interact with the media on the issue. (Refer to the "media contact list", posted on the intranet/communications).
- d) Requests for prepared information (e.g. articles) are processed as outlined under news and information releases (see Section 2).

Responding to requests:

- a) Redirect, or respond to, media requests promptly - the same day or within one working day.
- b) After responding to a request, complete the Media Contact Form PR0101 (F1) and forward to the Media Coordinator, Corporate Service for information and follow-up.

2) Release of Sensitive information

- a) When the release of information on individuals and institutions is deemed necessary to protect and promote the health of members of the public:
 - i) Employees in consultation with their Director will inform the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health or designate and the Media Coordinators when they become aware of information that should be considered for release to members of the public for the protection and promotion of their health.
 - ii) When such information is identified the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health or designate in consultation with the Director, Manager and team will determine the means of transmitting this information to those who need to know for health protection and promotion, using methods that prevent the transmission of this information to others who do not need it.
 - iii) The information transmitted will only have content that is necessary to protect and promote health. This will contain the minimum personal or confidential information as is necessary to protect the public's health.
 - iv) In situations where it is determined to be necessary to use the media to transmit information to protect and promote the health of members of the public (i.e. other methods are deemed to be insufficient to reach those requiring the information), the restrictions in 2a) iii apply.
 - v) In situations where transmitted information could lead to the identification of an institution or individual, the situation will be discussed in advance with the parties involved and where feasible their approval will be sought.

- b) When the media has approached the health unit seeking information on institutions and/or individuals, health unit employees will notify program management (Managers, Directors and MOH/AMOH) and Media Coordinators. The following considerations are applied when determining what information is released to the media in this situation:
 - i) Information that is part of a legal investigation is confidential unless it conforms to the guidelines in section 2a. However, once a legal issue is in the public domain (through the court system), the Program Director may, in consultation with the

- Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health deem it to be in the best interest of the program mandate to discuss some details of the situation (e.g. information on charges laid against a tobacco retailer to deter other retail sales to minors; general information on the mandate of the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) program and the obligation to report suspected abuse).
- ii) Information that could lead to the identification of institutions and/or individuals is confidential and will not be released unless required to protect the public's health.
 - iii) General information on the broader topic of interest to the media (e.g. institutional influenza outbreaks and our role and approaches in managing them; food premises and our role in food safety inspections) can be released as a means of responding to the request for confidential information. This can include collated statistical information on our district as a whole (e.g. the number of institutional influenza outbreaks in the district to date in the present year and past years).
- c) In health promotion campaigns, individuals may volunteer their personal information and permit the health unit to use this information to illustrate important health promotion, prevention or protection messages (e.g. a smoker trying to quit or a person identifying the need for community supports for continuation of breastfeeding).
- i) The Media Coordinators will ensure that the strategy is approved by the Program Manager.
 - ii) Staff will ensure that these individuals agree in writing using Media Use Consent Form PR0101 (F2) to have their names, photographs and related health information used in association with media stories within clearly defined parameters.

3) News and information releases (including public service announcements)

- a) The Media Coordinators, Corporate Service, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Director or designated staff, prepares health unit news and information for release to the media.
- b) The Media Consultant ensures material for release is approved in accordance with the procedures outlined by the service area.
- c) The Corporate Service Program Assistant distributes approved releases to the appropriate media as determined by the Media Coordinators with a notice provided to senior management.
- d) The Corporate Service Program Assistant forwards an electronic copy of all news releases to Health Connection and to the outer office contact persons in each office to file in the Media Release Binder for staff reference. In Barrie an electronic copy is directed to each Administrative Coordinator.
- e) The Corporate Service Program Assistant files an electronic copy of all news releases for Health Promotion and Communications team member reference.
- f) The Corporate Service Program Assistant forwards a copy of all news releases to the Helpdesk for urgent posting to the agency intranet and the health unit website (News Releases and the News Room).

4) Publicizing local activities and events - Public Service Announcement (PSA)

If approved by the Service Area Director or designate, staff can initiate contact with the media or respond to requests from the media for information about local programs, services and events.

- a) Refer to the public service announcement outline (see “PSA guidelines”, posted on the intranet/communications) for direction on positioning information about programs or events for the media.
- b) Staff preparing PSAs will use the agency PSA template.
- c) Contact the Media Coordinators for an up-to-date list of local media.
- d) Forward a final copy of the announcement to the Media Coordinators for information.

5) News Conferences

Major events or emergencies will necessitate timely communication to all pertinent news media. These events often attract intense attention from news media and/or demand more time from agency staff. News conferences can be an effective strategy for providing key messages and information to the public and community partners.

- a) The Health Communications team will assume the lead responsibility in the media conference preparations and follow up and will use the “Media Conference Planning Checklist” to guide their process (Appendix A).
- b) In the case of an emergency, news conferences may be held once daily or multiple times daily over the length of the emergency. Depending on the nature of the emergency, the health unit may be holding such a media conference in conjunction with the involved Emergency Operations Group (local, county or district level).
- c) Considerations for news conferences will include:
 - Booking of a suitable location for a media conference.
 - Timing of the conference. This should be scheduled at an hour that allows daily media to file their reports (generally between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.).
 - Selection and briefing of spokespeople and preparation of speaking notes.
 - Preparation of a press kit.
 - Determining whether local, provincial, national or international media need to be notified.
 - Preparing and moderating the event agenda.
 - Managing media calls before and after the conference according to the health unit’s emergency plan communications strategies. All media calls must be documented.

6) Letters to the Editor

There are times when letters to the editor are used to address public health related issues that have been covered by the media. This may be in the form of acknowledgement, or information clarification or correction.

- a) The Media Coordinators, Corporate Service, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, Associate Medical Officer of Health, Service Director or designated staff from the appropriate program prepares the letter for release to the appropriate newspaper media.
- b) The letter is signed by the appropriate agency/program authority with the appropriate position title of the agency authority.
- c) The Corporate Service Program Assistant produces the letter on health unit letterhead and distributes the approved letter to the appropriate newspaper media as determined by the Media Coordinators.
- d) The Corporate Service Program Assistant directs a copy of final letter to the appropriate program Director(s) and Manager(s) or staff person for reference.
- e) The Corporate Service Program Assistant files an electronic copy of all letters to the editor Health Communications team member reference

7) Coalitions and other Funded Programs

The health unit often enters into partnerships with community agencies, coalitions or non-government organizations to carry out mandated programs. These partnerships have emerged in a variety of forms, including but not limited to the following:

- health unit creates and runs a coalition, acts as lead agency or flow-through funding body
 - health unit sits on a coalition but does the majority of the work including media
 - health unit sits on a coalition and other organization does media
 - health Unit sits on a coalition and individuals do media work
 - major partner funds or dictates program but health unit staff do the work
 - major partner funds or dictates program but health unit staff are involved
- a) When the health unit is asked to support a partnership with public communication, the procedures will be guided by the relationship with the partners, as per the above list. The relationship will dictate whether the health unit acts as spokesperson, “ghost writer”, communications planner, disseminator, or simple copy editor. Managerial approval of text will also be required or not required, as dictated by the relationship in the partnership.
 - b) Media communications that are produced for distribution from the coalition do not carry the health unit’s branding and identity unless approved by senior management. When health unit staff are involved in communications as partners in a coalition, they speak on behalf of the coalition, and not on behalf of the health unit.

Related Forms

PR0101(F1) Media Contact Form
PR0101(F2) Media Use Consent
PR0101(F3) Media Conference Checklist

Related Policies

IM0101 – Information Privacy – Principles

Final Approval Signature: _____

Review/Revision History

December 19, 1990

June 26, 1996

September 2010 Policy re-numbered, previous number C1.020



Section A Press Conference Planning						
Done	Activity	Key Considerations	Details & Tasks	Who leading	To whom	Date / Time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deciding on a press conference	Are there valid reasons for holding one ... i.e., -is the reach broad enough to warrant it -is the issue important enough to bring media to it -does it reduce the number of media calls you'd get -does it make distributing the information more efficient Will a news release suffice? Are politicians involved/participating?	Establish timelines, deadlines Determine audience, age range, provincial, regional or local reach.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Booking venue	How many will attend? Is it being run in partnership with other agencies? If video presentations are planned, are there outside windows to deal with? Do we need to book a room in another location to allow for teleconference/videoconference link? Will additional lighting be needed for TV crews?				

Done	Activity	Key Considerations	Details & Tasks	Who leading	To whom	Date / Time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Booking resources	Acoustics, electronic needs. Will reporters want to plug into sound system? Will reporters need uplinks to Internet? Do we have equipment or will rental be required?	Check facility windows for curtains. Determine number of electrical, computer outlets available. Get banners, table skirts, logo placards. P.A. system if large room. Microphones, speakers' podium, laptops, DPM. Recording connections for reporters, if available/needed. Video camera, still camera, tape recorder and tripod (for internal use).			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contact any partners	TO BE DETERMINED: do we need speeches from politicians? Contact in person is best, through secretary next, Email or fax is last contact source	Let them know of format, date, etc-- sufficient advance notice to ensure attendance.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Contact with key players	Will board members participate, speak? Who is appropriate to moderate, who's available to greet VIPs, set up room.	Line up spokesperson(s). Assign greeter for VIP arrival. Assign moderator, inform support staff, receptionists. Inform Health Connection. Let them know of format, date etc.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Invitations	Formal invitations vs. letter vs. personal to be determined Which media to invite? Local or Local + national/provincial?	Key partners, guests, politicians, staff ... and media			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Draft News Release					

<input type="checkbox"/>	Draft press kit backgrounder(s)					
Done	Activity	Key Considerations	Details & Tasks	Who leading	To whom	Date / Time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Prepare press kit	What needs to be included? [such as backgrounders, biographies, press releases, hard copies of visual presentations, associated brochures]	* create backup hard copies of any visual presentations * backup copy of electronic presentations in network, on flash drive, or CD			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Speakers	Discussion, consultation with speakers, managers re: key messages - who is preparing speakers' notes? For HU members? For others?	Prepare key speakers' notes.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agenda	1. Confirm with key speakers re: amount of time they'll have, want (or a compromise between the two) 2. Confirm date & time - if event takes place over a meal time, light snacks are a courtesy to the reporters	Ideally: 15 min. for speakers 15 min for formal Q&A			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Anticipated Q&A	Discuss, consult with speakers, managers to anticipate questions from media	Prepare Q&A sheet for interviewees			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approval of press kit	Backgrounder, press release				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitoring / Evaluation	How much follow-up evaluation will be needed? - event debrief time allocated	Assign videotaper, recorder Media sign-in sheet at entrance			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Media advisory re: press conference	As much lead time as is possible, but normally no more than 2 days.	Post media advisory to main page of the website newsroom - highlighted within news box Give webmaster heads up that event and media communications to be posted		all media	

Done	Activity	Key Considerations	Details & Tasks	Who leading	To whom	Date / Time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Preps for conference	Day before, or if time is not available, two hours before	Print out press releases, backgrounders, assemble press kits Finalized speaking notes to MOH, Simcoe, Muskoka speakers AV equipment setup			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Press Conference room setup	tablecloths & table skirts, speaker's podium, water and glasses for speaker(s) set up displays, corporate art at front of speaker's podium, other branding	Press kits & agenda laid out either on entrance table or on seats			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Press Conference room setup	ready A/V equipment ready teleconference/videoconference hookups enough lead time needed to order replacement equipment if tests show failure	Teleconference/televideo hookup prep and tests Have backup equipment & plans in place			
<input type="checkbox"/>	15 min. prior to press conference	Greeter collect names of partners, politicians and media in attendance - prepare list of dignitaries, VIPs in attendance		Communications team member assigned		
<input type="checkbox"/>	10 min. prior to press conference	Cushion of time for radio, TV to set up mikes, cameras, recorders .. Or hook up audio equipment to sound system.				

Section B Press Conference Event

Done	Activity	Key Considerations	Details & Tasks	Who leading	To whom	Date / Time
<input type="checkbox"/>	Introductory remarks	5 minutes is all that is needed.	Inform media of purpose, spokesperson's name and title, and outline schedule of press conference	Moderator (likely Media Coordinators)		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Speeches/statements	15 minutes	Moderator introduce each of the speakers			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Q&A with press	15 minutes	Moderator invites questions one at a time			
<input type="checkbox"/>	1:1 interview time (scrum)	dependent on schedules of speakers				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Photo ops (if needed)					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Press release	Press release needs to be sent to all media (in attendance or not) after the press conference starts	Program Assistant distributes to media (as directed by the Media Coordinators) while the press conference is underway. Program assistant forwards press release to Helpdesk for urgent posting to the website.			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Post event debrief	Media turnout, partner turnout - speakers covered topic in clear, engaging manner, stuck to key message - handling of Q & A - any unexpected questions? How handled?	Assess success, shortcomings	Communications team and event participants/organizers		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cleanup		Pack up and return all equipment and promo materials thanks (informal or formal) to participants			