

# Communicating with the Media

## A Healthcare Professional's Perspective

*K T Poon*

*Chief Manager (Corporate Communication)*

*Hong Kong College of Emergency Medicine  
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醫院管理局  
HOSPITAL  
AUTHORITY

# Everyone has the right to voice his / her own views

## As an individual

- Clinician (front-line)
- Manager (front-line)
- Manager (Head Office)

*\* Conflicting objectives and considerations?*



# Everyone has the right to voice his / her own views

## As a corporate person

- Part of management team (Hospital and Head Office)
- Part of the policy making group (Bureau)
- Part of the government (SARCE Office)

*\* Who should make the final decision / be held responsible?*



# Media attitude

- If in doubt, check it out
- If in doubt, leave it out
- If in doubt, print it out

\* *“Exclusivity” is King!*



# Media competition (1)

- **Market driven – how mass?**
- **Competition fierce – new / old media, “zero-sum” game**
- **Point of difference – content, design, price, readers**



# Media competition (2)

- **Time constraints and pressure – deadline shift VS real time**
- **Short memory of readers and responsibility (tomorrow is another day)**
- **Turnover and attrition of practitioners – lack continuity and professional conduct**



# What is News today

- **Actions (visually intriguing)**
- **Conflicts (unexpected, acute)**
- **Human and system errors (levels of accountability)**
- **Accusations / allegations (speculative / real)**



# Requirements of reporters

- **The incident : background, involved and related parties, sequence of events, latest development and expected outcome**
- **Facts : dates and numbers, names, data**
- **Personal opinion and views, official (corporate) position and response, “quotable quotes”**
- **Insider information, gossips, soft news, behind-the-scene stories**



# Communication objectives

- Hope for the Best (outcome)
- Plan for the Worst (process)

## External factors / matters

- Political, environmental, situational... Act of God  
More “uncontrollable”

## Internal Factors / Matters

- Staff, product, service, equipment and machinery, system...  
More “controllable”



# Challenges of corporate /manager in communication (1)

- 1. Threatening in nature : to individual's life, to corporation's reputation...**
- 2. Urgent : no time to thoroughly discuss and consider alternatives with all parties concerned**



# Challenges of corporate /manager in communication (2)

- 3. Uncertain : unknown and uncontrollable factors, lack of experience and resources**
- 4. Continuous and contagious : further deterioration, escalation of accountability, shift in confidence level**



# Communication test / Strategy objectives

- **Short-term : must serve the stakeholders / shareholders**
- **Long-term : must serve the public (public good)**



# Corporate / Individual considerations

## “TRUST EQUITY”

- Amongst peer group, within organization, in the community and society
- Most important equity in future



# Corporate / Individual considerations

## Tipping point ((Public Tolerance Level)

- On corporate policies / decisions and responses
- On individual's attitude, behaviour and choice of words
- On regulatory remedies
- On past history and experience



# Engagement of the stakeholders

- **Transparency and openness most important**
- **Ethical policies and decisions crucial (less bureaucratic and legalistic)**
- **Accountability clear and pro-active**



# Pitfalls to be avoided

- **Legal and policy not only considerations and in self-protection mechanism**
- **PR and lobbying not enough**
- **Priority of consideration:**
  1. **Empathetic (with patient / family / public)**
  2. **Reasonable (ethical and social norms)**
  3. **Legal (contractual)**



# Beyond tipping point

- Will not be treated with understanding, subtlety and finesse
- Crude and unfair reaction & judgment against corporation / individual
- Abuse breeds abuse (Domino effect)



# Communication process (1)

- **Sensitive to symptoms and stakeholders' reaction**
- **Alert to initial happenings**
- **Listen to third party opinion (360°)**



# Communication process (2)

- **Estimate and plan (on development and consequences)**
- **Manage and intervene if necessary**
- **Critique and learning (self and system)**
- **Training and practice**

