
Media Policy

Solent NHS Trust policies can only be considered to be valid and up-to-date if viewed on the intranet. Please visit the intranet for the latest version.

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|---|---|
| Purpose of Agreement | This document details Solent NHS Trust's policy on engaging the mass media for publicity purposes. The mass media refers to radio, television, newspapers, magazines, social media, websites and/or any other means of disseminating information to a wide audience. This engagement includes with and through journalists, photographers, researchers, web editors, bloggers and any other representative from the mass media. |
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Amendments Summary:

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| 1. | | | Introduction and Purpose: Added confirmation staff put forward for interviews are supported by the Marketing Communications Team | June 2016 |
| 2. | | | Scope and definitions: specific inclusion of governors and NEDS as covered by this policy | June 2016 |
| 3 | | | Definitions: Further explanation of the term 'consent' | June 2016 |
| 4. | | | Process/requirements: Deletion of reference to Whistleblowing Policy' as it listed elsewhere | June 2016 |
| 5. | | | Promoting good/positive stories: Deletion of last paragraph as it was repetition of information provided elsewhere | June 2016 |
| 6. | | | Roles and responsibilities: Removal of Head of Marketing Communications as contact person for out of hours enquiries | June 2016 |
| 7. | | | Appendix D: Updated contact details | June 2016 |
| 8. | | | Appendix E: Revised flow chart to make easier to follow/understand | June 2016 |

Review Log:

| Version Number | Review Date | Lead Name | Ratification Process | Notes |
|----------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 2 | 02/06/16 | Elton Dzikiti | | Review following expiry |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

SUMMARY OF POLICY

This policy outlines how Solent NHS Trust engages with the mainstream media to raise awareness of the business and clinical services provided. The policy also stipulates how enquiries from the media must be handled so that the organisation's reputation is protected.

The main import of the policy is to manage and coordinate engagement with the media so that the Trust is seen to speak with one voice and the 'right' people are put forward to represent the organisation.

The Marketing Communications Team are the custodians of the policy and will need to be involved in all opportunities to engage with the media. All enquiries from the media, without exception, must be referred to the Marketing Communications Team in the first instance.

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1. INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

- 1.1 Engaging with the mass media is an important part of enhancing the reputation of Solent NHS Trust. Failing to manage media relations successfully can lead to the organisation's reputation being damaged.
- 1.2 NHS organisations are subject to continual and regular media enquiries. It is, therefore, essential for Solent NHS Trust to have a policy in place for responding to media enquiries and other proactive engagement. Not only does this ensure the reputation of Solent NHS Trust is protected and upheld but it also guards the reputation of the NHS as a whole.
- 1.3 Additionally, the policy ensures staff who have been put forward for interviews are provided with the necessary guidance and support in dealing with the media.
- 1.4 The NHS is an internationally recognised brand. Everything NHS staff say and do can impact on how the NHS is perceived.
- 1.5 Positive media coverage helps Solent NHS Trust attract and retain staff and maintain the confidence of patients and the public. Negative media coverage can damage staff morale and public confidence and, despite the exceptionally high quality of our services, can worry and upset our patients.
- 1.6 Damage to morale and confidence can be instantaneous and catastrophic, or gradual and erosive. In the former, the damage may be irreparable whereas in the latter case this damage can be repaired but needs a great investment of time and effort.
- 1.7 Dealing with the media calls for a planned, sustained and regulated approach. This policy seeks to put in place a system or process that everyone needs to follow, without fail, when it comes to dealing with the mass media.
- 1.8 This media engagement policy also aims to make sure Solent NHS Trust is proactive in managing its reputation; is consistent in its approach to its relationship with the media and has a realistic overview of how it is perceived as an organisation and how what it does might be of interest to the media.
- 1.9 All line managers and teams leaders must familiarise themselves with the contents and implications of this policy. It is also their responsibility to ensure that all staff they manage and lead, already in post and new starters, are aware of this policy document.

2. SCOPE & DEFINITIONS

SCOPE

- 2.1 This document applies to all directly and indirectly employed staff within Solent NHS Trust and other persons working within the organisation in line with the organisation's Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy . This includes the Trust's Governors and Non Executive Directors if they are speaking to the media about the NHS in general or Solent NHS Trust in particular; or will be identified as linked to Solent NHS Trust.

DEFINITIONS

- 2.3 For purpose of this document, the following definitions apply

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Journalist</i> | A writer or editor for a newspaper or magazine or for television or radio |
| <i>Mass media</i> | Newspapers, television, radio, online and social media that communicate news and information to large numbers of people |
| <i>Communications</i> | All of the communications media that reach a large audience, especially television, radio, newspapers, online media |
| <i>Marketing Communications Team</i> | Team of professionals employed by Solent NHS Trust to deal with all communications matters |
| <i>Publicity</i> | Promotional activity, such as media relations, advertising or the dissemination of information, designed to increase public interest in or awareness of something or somebody |
| <i>Reputation</i> | The views that are generally held about somebody or something |
| <i>Consent</i> | To give formal permission for something to happen for purposes of this policy, this may be permission to use take one's photograph for publicity purposes |
| <i>Approval</i> | Official sanction, e.g. formal or official agreement or permission by a manager to proceed with publicity plans |
| <i>Press/media release</i> | An official statement or account of a news story that is especially prepared and issued to newspapers and other news media for them to make known to the public |
| <i>Press/media statement</i> | An official statement or report that an organisation gives to journalists in reaction to a story they will be publishing (or broadcasting) or has already been covered |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Proactive</i> | Publicising information or stories that are of interest to the media, rather than expecting the media or public to know what is going on or approach us for more information, or waiting until problems develop. |
| <i>Reactive</i> | Reacting to media interest or enquiries rather than initiating or instigating publicity |
| <i>Media enquiry</i> | An approach from the media for information, comment or access to facilities in pursuance of a media/public consumption story |

3. PROCESS/REQUIREMENTS

3.1 MEDIA ENQUIRIES (reactive)

- 3.1.1. The Marketing Communications Team should, and normally is, the first point of contact for members of the media enquiring about Solent NHS Trust policies, procedures, personnel matters, services, patients' care and treatment, estates, activities and anything else that is related to the organisation.
- 3.1.2. The Marketing Communications Team will either answer the enquiry directly using information supplied by relevant members of staff, or ensure that the appropriate member of staff is supported to respond on behalf of Solent NHS Trust.
- 3.1.3. Staff are not permitted to make contact with the media to pass on information nor to express opinions in relation to any patient or other matter related to Solent NHS Trust. The only exception to this requirement is when they have obtained prior express permission from their manager, in consultation with the Marketing Communications Team.
- 3.1.4. Contacting the media outside of this arrangement would be a breach of this policy and may result in disciplinary action being considered or taken through established processes as stipulated in the Solent NHS Trust Disciplinary Policy.
- 3.1.5. Should staff be approached by the media to comment – off or on the record* – they must decline the request and redirect the journalist to the Marketing Communications Team, via telephone 023 8060 8934/5/6/7 without fail.
- 3.1.6. This is standard practice and journalists will be aware of this requirement but may still make approaches in the hope someone will provide them with the information they require

* NB: there is no such thing as 'off the record', if a journalist hears something and thinks it is of interest to the public they will find a way of using this information.
- 3.1.7. Solent NHS Trust has got an absolute duty of care to our patients. This also includes observing and maintaining patient confidentiality in line with the NHS Code of Confidentiality. Under normal circumstances there will be no basis for disclosure of confidential and identifiable information to the media.
- 3.1.8. Permission to discuss the care and treatment of patients, including the taking of pictures and moving images (filming) must always be obtained before any media involvement. Again, this

needs to be approved by the Marketing Communications Team who will provide a consent form (see APPENDICES B; C and D) that will be signed by the patient and staff involved and sent back to the Marketing Communications Team for filing.

- 3.1.9. If consent cannot be obtained from the patient because of incapacity; death or they are a young person, a close relative – personal representative - must consent before any patient details are disclosed with the media. In such circumstances, the Marketing Communications Team; the Patient Experience Service and the Information Governance Team must all be consulted and must approve all planned media engagement. Where necessary, the Trust's Claims and Litigation Team will be approached for further guidance.
- 3.1.10. There will be occasions, however, when NHS organisations and staff are asked for information about individual patients. The Marketing Communications Team will work with other teams including those outlined in preceding point, as well as the Executive, to consider whether disclosure is justifiable.

Examples include:

- Requests for updates on the condition of particular patients, e.g. Celebrities;
 - In distressing circumstances, e.g. following a fire or road traffic accident;
 - In circumstances where a patient or a patient's relatives are complaining publicly and unfairly about the treatment and care provided.
- 3.1.11. In distressing circumstances, care must be taken to avoid breaching the confidentiality of patients whilst dealing sympathetically with requests for information.
- 3.1.12. Where a patient is not competent to make a decision about disclosure, the views of family members must be sought and decisions made in the patient's best interests.
- 3.1.13. Where information is already in the public domain, placed there by individuals or by other agencies such as the police, consent is not required for confirmation or a simple statement that the information is incorrect.
- 3.1.14. Where additional information is to be disclosed, e.g. to correct statements made to the media, patient consent must be sought but disclosure without consent may well be justified in the public interest. The patients concerned and/or their representatives must be advised of any forthcoming statement and the reasons for it.
- 3.1.15. There is clearly a strong public interest in ensuring that the reputations of NHS staff and organisations are not unfairly and publicly maligned, but there is a competing public interest in sustaining the reputation of the NHS as a secure and confidential service that must also be considered. Disclosures need to be justified on a case by case basis and must be limited to the minimum necessary in the circumstances.
- 3.1.16. Most media enquiries are made directly to the Marketing Communications Team. However, if any other member of staff receives an enquiry from the media (including any request to film on Solent NHS Trust premises, whether rented or owned by the Trust) you must:
- make a note of the caller's name and phone number/email address, the media they are representing, and the nature of their enquiry
 - inform them that an appropriate person will contact them directly

- pass the information to the Marketing Communications Team as soon as possible (see APPENDIX E). This is standard practice and journalists will be aware of this requirement.

See APPENDIX F for a sign off process flow chart

3.2 DEALING WITH MEDIA INTEREST (reactive)

- 3.2.1. Where a potentially controversial story is being covered, journalists will try to gain as much information as possible. Staff must be aware that what can appear to be a simple telephone conversation can lead to inadvertently passing on of information that may be misinterpreted and /or breach patient confidentiality.
- 3.2.2. Staff must always pass on any call from the media – or suspect call (as journalists may use a number of ways to gain information and may not always disclose who they are) – to the Marketing Communications Team. See Appendix A for contact details.

3.3 PROMOTING GOOD/POSITIVE STORIES (PROACTIVE)

- 3.3.1. Media releases can help to publicise matters of interest, decisions that have been made, events and achievements etc.
- 3.3.2. The Marketing Communications Team issues all of Solent NHS Trust's media releases and maintains a database of everything that is issued.
- 3.3.3. All news releases are loaded onto our website at www.solent.nhs.uk
- 3.3.4. The media receive huge amounts of press releases daily so there are no guarantees that a press release will be picked up. To help secure a share of voice for Solent NHS Trust, the Marketing Communications will, where possible, 'sell in' a good news story to a publication over the phone or at a face to face meeting rather than rely on email correspondence.
- 3.3.5. The Marketing Communications Team monitors media coverage every day and disseminate coverage via the Solent Comms email.

3.4 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

- 3.4.1. The media is increasingly using the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information from organisations, sometimes openly but sometimes without disclosing who they are.
- 3.4.2. Any FOI request must be dealt with by the Information Governance Team. See Appendix E for contact details.
- 3.4.3. If it is known or suspected the enquiry is from the media, the Marketing Communications Team will work together with the Information Governance Team to provide a response.

3.5 SERIOUS INCIDENTS AND MAJOR INCIDENTS

- 3.5.1. These types of incidents can generate the rapid appearance of large numbers of reporters, photographers and camera crews. Sometimes these are related to the treatment of high profile people or an unexpected occurrence such as a major transport incident or local disaster

- 3.5.2. The Trust has a Major Incident Plan and Serious Incident Policy which provide instruction and guidance in regard to media management in the event of such incidents. Staff must ensure they are familiar with these policies.

4. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 The Marketing Communications Team is the first point of contact for members of the media enquiring about anything or anyone linked to Solent NHS Trust.
- 4.2 The team can be contacted Monday to Friday, 08:30 – 17:00 hrs .Please see Appendix E for contact details. Outside of these hours, please refer to the Trust’s Director on call.
- 4.3 The Marketing Communications Team will endeavour, subject to press/media deadlines, to ensure that appropriate clinical and managerial staff are involved in discussions about any proposed response and that where appropriate any external organisation are informed and involved.
- 4.4 In the unlikely event that a member of the Marketing Communications Team cannot be contacted to deal with an urgent media enquiry, then staff must pass the call to the most senior manager they can locate. The senior manager must then liaise with the Director on call.
- 4.5 Solent NHS Trust employs a small team of experienced marketing communications professionals whose duties include:
- making sure good news stories are given maximum publicity and potentially damaging issues are handled with sensitivity and care
 - offering advice and support to staff and senior managers on how issues relating to potentially good or bad news should be handled
 - being aware of developments in the media, and throughout the NHS, so as to provide background knowledge to issues relating to the Solent NHS Trust
 - developing strong working relationships with journalists and other communications teams from the local health economy as well as national regulatory and statutory bodies such as Monitor, NHS Improvement and Care Quality Commission
 - working with Commissioners on local issues that may attract media interest
 - protecting the reputation of the organisation
 - issuing proactive media releases and reactive statements
 - being the first point of contact for media enquiries
 - dealing with all media enquiries
 - dealing with information that needs to be cascaded speedily and accurately.
- 4.6 Managers would be expected to ensure compliance with this policy and to approach the Marketing Communications Team in the first instance with any plans to engage with the media – proactively or reactively.

5. TRAINING

- 5.1. The Marketing Communications Team recommends that senior managers receive media training in anticipation of media interviews. The training is arranged by the Marketing Communications Team.
- 5.2. All other staff put forward for interviews will be fully supported before, during and after the interview by the Marketing Communications Team. This support includes drafting briefing documents and key messages; accompanying staff to recording studios/media houses for interviews as and when needed.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND MENTAL CAPACITY

- 6.1. A thorough and systematic assessment of this policy has been undertaken in accordance with the organisations Policy on Equality and Human Rights.
- 6.2. The assessment found that the implementation of and compliance with this policy has no impact on any employee on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, faith, or sexual orientation. See Appendix F.

7. SUCCESS CRITERIA / MONITORING EFFECTIVENESS

- 7.1. The Marketing Communications Team logs all media activity daily - and this includes monitoring of published or broadcast Solent NHS Trust related stories. This monitoring enables almost instant monitoring of effectiveness of policy.
- 7.2. Daily monitoring identifies exception to policy compliance. Remedial work is undertaken to apprise managers of appropriate processes and address any negative media coverage. The Executive Team is informed on a weekly basis of media activity but is also given immediate updates on major reputation issues.
- 7.3. All images and information supplied to the media must have been approved by – or have some involvement of the Marketing Communications Team. Enquiries would be made to establish source of information for media stories that would not have come through Communications Team.

8. REVIEW

- 8.1. This document may be reviewed at any time at the request of either at staff side or management, but will automatically be reviewed three years from initial approval and thereafter on a triennial basis unless organisational changes, legislation, guidance or non-compliance prompt an earlier review.

9. REFERENCES AND LINKS TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

- 9.1 Other Solent NHS Trust policies that must be read in conjunction with this policy include:
 - VIP Policy
 - Social Media Policy

- Incident Investigation Procedure
- Serious Incident Requiring Investigation Policy
- Violence and Aggression Policy
- Being Open Policy
- Freedom to Speak Up Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Information Governance Policy
- Supporting Staff involved in Incidents, Investigation, Complaints, Litigation and Claims Policy
- Audio Visual Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy

9.2 All of these can be found on Solent NHS Trust intranet.

9.3 You can also refer to the NHS brand guidelines at: www.nhsidentity.nhs.uk

10. GLOSSARY

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Journalist</i> | A writer or editor for a newspaper or magazine or for television or radio |
| <i>Mass media</i> | Newspapers, television, radio, online and social media that communicate news and information to large numbers of people |
| <i>Communications</i> | All of the communications media that reach a large audience, especially television, radio, newspapers, online media |
| <i>Marketing Communications Team</i> | Team of professionals employed by Solent NHS Trust to deal with all communications matters |
| <i>Publicity</i> | Promotional activity, such as media relations, advertising or the dissemination of information, designed to increase public interest in or awareness of something or somebody |
| <i>Reputation</i> | The views that are generally held about somebody or something |
| <i>Consent</i> | To give formal permission for something to happen - For purposes of this policy, this may be permission to use take one's photograph for publicity purposes |
| <i>Approval</i> | Official sanction, e.g. formal or official agreement or permission by a manager to proceed with publicity plans |
| <i>Press/media release</i> | An official statement or account of a news story that is especially prepared and issued to newspapers and other news media for them to make known to the public. |
| <i>Press/media statement</i> | An official statement or report that an organisation gives to journalists in reaction to a story they will be publishing (or broadcasting) or has already been covered. |
| <i>Proactive</i> | Publicising information or stories that are of interest to the media, rather than expecting the media or public to know what is going on or approach us for more |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| | information, or waiting until problems develop. |
| <i>Reactive</i> | Reacting to media interest or enquiries rather than initiating or instigating publicity |
| <i>Media enquiry</i> | An approach from the media for information, comment or access to facilities in pursuance of a media/public consumption story |

Appendix: A

Equality Impact Assessment

| <u>Step 1 – Scoping; identify the policies aims</u> | Answer | | |
|---|---|-----------|---|
| 1. What are the main aims and objectives of the document? | To ensure Solent NHS Trust is proactive in managing its reputation; is consistent in its approach to its relationship with the media and has a good overview of how it is perceived as an organisation. | | |
| 2. Who will be affected by it? | All staff | | |
| 3. What are the existing performance indicators/measures for this? What are the outcomes you want to achieve? | Communications Team logs all media activity – proactive and reactive and reports to Directors. Through implementation of this policy, it will make the process of media engagement clearer to all staff – and help manage organisational reputation | | |
| 4. What information do you already have on the equality impact of this document? | None. Media Engagement policies are common practice in all NHS bodies within England | | |
| 5. Are there demographic changes or trends locally to be considered? | No | | |
| 6. What other information do you need? | None | | |
| <u>Step 2 - Assessing the Impact; consider the data and research</u> | Yes | No | Answer (Evidence) |
| 1. Could the document unlawfully against any group? | | x | |
| 2. Can any group benefit or be excluded? | | x | |
| 3. Can any group be denied fair & equal access to or treatment as a result of this document? | | x | |
| 4. Can this actively promote good relations with and between different groups? | x | | |
| 5. Have you carried out any consultation internally/externally with relevant individual groups? | x | | Team; IG; Risk Management; other local NHS bodies |
| 6. Have you used a variety of different methods of | x | | Team discussions. Approaches to other local |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------------|
| consultation/involvement | | | NHS Comms teams |
| Mental Capacity Act implications | | x | |
| 7. Will this document require a decision to be made by or about a service user? (Refer to the Mental Capacity Act document for further information) | | x | |

If there is no negative impact – end the Impact Assessment here.

| <u>Step 3 - Recommendations and Action Plans</u> | Answer |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Is the impact low, medium or high? | |
| 2. What action/modification needs to be taken to minimise or eliminate the negative impact? | |
| 3. Are there likely to be different outcomes with any modifications? Explain these? | |
| <u>Step 4- Implementation, Monitoring and Review</u> | Answer |
| 1. What are the implementation and monitoring arrangements, including timescales? | |
| 2. Who within the Department/Team will be responsible for monitoring and regular review of the document? | |
| <u>Step 5 - Publishing the Results</u> | Answer |
| How will the results of this assessment be published and where? (It is essential that there is documented evidence of why decisions were made). | |

****Retain a copy and also include as an appendix to the document****

Appendix B:



Consent form for commissioning photography of adults for media publications

Name: _____

Address: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

NHS number (where applicable): _____

Location of photograph _____

Solent NHS Trust would like to take photographs of you for promotional purposes. These images may appear in printed publications or on our website.

We need your permission before we take your image. Please answer the questions below and sign and date the form.

May we use your image in our printed publications Yes / No

May we use your image on our website? Yes / No

Are you happy for Solent NHS Trust to use your image in any release or articles we do with the local and national media? Yes / No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Conditions of use:

- This form is valid for two years from the agreed stipulated period. Consent will expire after this time.
- Solent NHS Trust will not use these images after this time without gaining permission from you.
- We will not include any personal details (postal address, telephone number or fax numbers) in our publications or website.

Appendix C:

Consent form for photography of children for media publications

Name of parent/Guardian _____

Name of child _____

Address: _____

Contact Number _____

NHS number (where applicable): _____

Location of photograph _____

Solent NHS Trust would like to take photographs of your child/children for promotional purposes. These images may appear in printed publications or on our website.

We need your permission before we take any images of your child/children. Please answer the questions below and sign and date the form.

Please return the form to: Marketing Communications Team, Solent NHS Trust, Highpoint, Bursledon Road, Southampton, SO19 8BR

May we use your child's image in our printed publications Yes / No

May we use your child's image on our website? Yes / No

Are you happy for Solent NHS Trust to use your child's image in any release or articles we do with the local and national media? Yes / No

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Conditions of use:

- This form is valid for two years from the agreed stipulated period. Consent will expire after this time.
- Solent NHS Trust will not use these images after this time without gaining permission from you.
- We will not include any personal details (postal address, telephone number or fax numbers) in our publications or website.

Appendix D:

MEDIA CONSENT FORM

Press photography/ filming

Once the photographs/ film footage has been taken they become the property of that media organisation and not Solent NHS Trust. Therefore any objections to this will need to be made to them and not Solent NHS Trust.

| | |
|---|--|
| Date of interview/ photograph | |
| Location | |
| Name of person interviewed/photographed | |
| Name of parent/guardian if patient is under 16 | |
| Patient contact number | |
| TV/Radio/Newspaper involved | |
| Reporter's name | |
| Reporter's contact number | |
| I consent that the photographs may be used for publication/viewing, and for the purposes of this filming only that <i>(insert name)</i> may speak about the particulars of my case. | |
| Signed | |
| Date Time | |
| Any further details: | |
| | |

Appendix E:

Contact Details

Communications Team

| <i>Title</i> | <i>Office Tel</i> | <i>Email address(es)</i> |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Head of Marketing Communications | 023 8060 8935 or mobile 07881 824149 | andrea.hewitt@solent.nhs.uk |
| PR Manager | 023 8060 8934 | elton.dzikiti@solent.nhs.uk |
| Communications Manager (on maternity leave) | 023 8060 8936 | lauren.riddle@solent.nhs.uk |
| Graphic Designer | 023 8060 8913 | luke.johnson@solent.nhs.uk |
| Marketing Communications Coordinator | 023 8060 8889 | Rebecca.chard@solent.nhs.uk |
| | | |

Non-urgent enquiries can be e-mailed to communications@solent.nhs.uk

If you would like to work with the Marketing Communications Team to issue a press release or invite the media to attend an event or meeting, please contact any of the above listed members of the team.

Information Governance Team

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Head of Information Governance | 023 8029 6911 | sadie.bell@solent.nhs.uk sadie.bell@nhs.net |
| Information Governance Team | 023 8029 6922 / 023 8053 8770 | SNHS.SolentIGTeam@nhs.net |

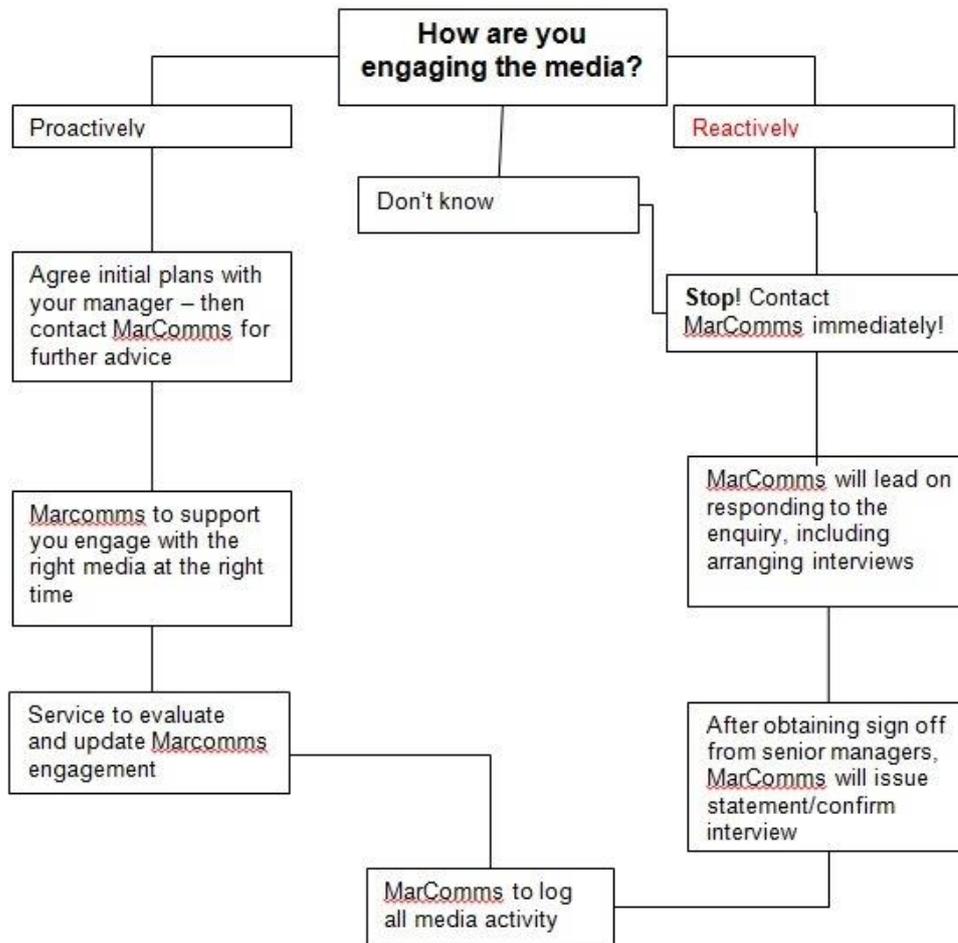
Patient Experience Service

Patient Advice and Liaison Service and Complaints

PALS
Highpoint
Bursledon Road
Southampton
SO19 8BR

Telephone: (Free phone) 0800 013 2319 Email snhs.solentfeedback@nhs.net

Appendix F: Engagement with the media flow chart



Appendix G

GENERAL GUIDANCE - DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

Having referred the issue to the Marketing Communications Team and you are subsequently required to talk to the media, the following guidance may be useful:

Only speak "On the Record"

From the moment the media approaches you, whether by telephone or in person, your conversation will be treated as "on the record". This means that any of your comments can be reported whether you intend them for public consumption or not. If you do not want a comment reported, avoid saying it!

Speaking Off the Record

This does not exist – if an issue is of interest to the media, they will cover it and you risk putting your reputation and that of the Trust at risk. Only speak to the media if you are prepared to be quoted for what you have said.

Clarity

Be clear about what you want to say before you say it, and use clear, everyday language. NHS jargon or complex clinical descriptions are meaningless to the public - so refrain from using them. If you cannot totally avoid jargon altogether, do find an alternative, simpler explanation of the words you'd have used. Do not allow yourself to be rushed or pushed into saying something you don't mean. If you need thinking time to ensure that you are clear about your facts, say you will ring the media back (unless it's live radio). Please ensure that you do so.

Simplicity

Even if you spend half an hour talking to a reporter, very few of your comments are likely to be reported. This is because many articles are short, or other people's comments also have to be reported within the same article. It helps to think of two or three key points, which you can reiterate and expand on so that your main messages are more likely to be reported.

Using your expertise

Usually you will know far more about the subject under discussion than the reporter so do not be afraid to correct misconceptions or take the initiative to introduce new information which may be of more interest.

Deadlines

All reporters work to strict deadlines which are imposed by their "news desk" (a group of senior staff who co-ordinate the news gathering operation of a particular newspaper, radio station or television company).

Reporters will often demand instant comments, but you must not feel pressured into making off-the-cuff comments. You must take a telephone number and call back within an agreed timescale.

With rare exceptions, it is best to respond to all enquiries, particularly those relating to potentially damaging allegations. You must remember that if you do not respond within the deadline, the reporter is not obliged to check with you again before publishing or broadcasting the news item, even if the result is an unbalanced report.

Remember that the Trust wants to work in a collaborative fashion with the media and therefore wants to demonstrate a willingness to help with enquiries and an ability to do so in a professional manner with awareness of their needs and deadlines.

Confidentiality

Individual patient confidentiality must be observed and respected. Even if a patient has put their private life into the public domain - for example, by telling the media of a complaint about the care provided by Solent NHS Trust - it does not entitle you to expose all their personal details or question their motive for making a complaint.

POTENTIAL PITFALLS

If you are dealing with the media on behalf of Solent NHS Trust it may be helpful to remember the following points:

Personal opinions

Be clear with the media if you are expressing a personal opinion. However, you must be aware that if you are speaking on behalf of Solent NHS Trust, your views may be represented as those of the organisation or, if they differ from the "corporate" view, they may be represented as evidence of conflict within Solent NHS Trust.

Anger

Never allow yourself to become angry or make personal attacks on the reporter. The media will often play 'Devil's Advocate' to provoke a reaction and then report comments made in haste/anger. You may be robust in your comments without becoming angry.

Importantly

Report back to the Marketing Communications Team

Be sure to let the Marketing Communications Team know about your conversation with the media: who you spoke to and from which publication/programme/channel, what was said, how you felt the conversation went, and when you are anticipating the story will be featured in the media.