

POOLE HOSPITAL NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

Report to the Trust Board 26 March 2008

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

'Falsehood flies and the truth comes limping after; so that when men come to be undeceived it is too late: the jest is over and the tale has had its effect'.

Jonathan Swift

1. WHY WE NEED A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- 1.1 The purpose of this strategy is to clarify the arrangements for communicating with our staff, patients and stakeholders; and to set out what needs to be done to help Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust deliver its objectives.
- 1.2 The strategy takes a focused and integrated approach to communications, which is in line with the Trust's vision and business objectives set out in the Future Services Strategy. It will support delivery of the goals set out in the Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Annual Plan, the Capital Programme and Local Delivery Plan.
- 1.3 The Trust recognises that good communication is vital to the success of the organisation, especially during a period of transition and change. Good communications can help to:
 - inform and educate;
 - promote awareness;
 - engage and involve;
 - facilitate change;
 - earn understanding and support;
 - influence opinion and behaviour.
- 1.4 We believe that our communications should be based on a set of guiding principles and standards consistent with the values set down the Poole Approach, which underpins our philosophy of care.
- 1.5 The Poole Approach states that Poole Hospital will strive to provide: 'friendly professional, patient-centred care with dignity and respect for all'.
- 1.6 This means that our patients will receive excellent care and treatment in a safe and clean environment and that we:
 - listen to our staff, patients and the public;
 - give information that is relevant and accessible;
 - safeguard patient privacy, confidentiality and choice;
 - welcome and involve families, carers and friends to participate in care;
 - treat each other with respect and consideration;
 - value and benefit from diversity in beliefs, cultures and abilities;

- continually improve the quality of our services by learning from what we do;
- take responsibility and are accountable for our own actions;
- expect staff and patients to take their share of responsibility for their own health;
- work with and support all organisations that are committed to promoting the health of local people.

1.7 Our communications will adhere to this set of values and be:

- two way and inclusive;
- open and honest;
- consistent;
- relevant and accessible;
- planned, targeted and timely;
- concise and clear;
- corporate;
- publicly accountable;
- measured and regularly reviewed.

1.8 These values apply equally across all of Poole Hospital's key audiences: our patients and public; staff; commissioners, stakeholders and our members.

1.9 The strategy and supporting policies will enable us to plan our communications and ensure that they make best use of resources and are delivered to the same high-quality standards as our clinical services.

2. WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Our overall aims are to positively promote the work of the Trust and to actively inform and engage all of our key audiences and stakeholders, both internal and external.

2.2 The key objectives of the communications strategy are to:

- ensure that staff, patients, stakeholders and the local community receive timely, relevant and accurate information about the Trust, and that we listen and respond to their views;
- raise the profile of Poole Hospital and promote its reputation as a centre of excellence, offering first-class, patient-centred services which are provided with dignity and respect at all times;
- maintain public confidence in our services so that people view Poole as the hospital of choice;
- integrate communications within the Trust's overall business objectives;
- provide robust arrangements for maintaining good relations with the media;

- help Poole Hospital's staff, patients and stakeholders to understand what being an NHS Foundation Trust means for them, and to actively encourage membership;
- define how we co-operate with third parties with roles in relation to the hospital.

3. WHERE WE ARE NOW - CURRENT COMMUNICATIONS STRUCTURE

3.1 The Communications function within the Trust is led by the Director of Communications and Marketing, who reports directly to the Chief Executive. The membership and fundraising functions also sit within the Directorate, enabling us to make best use of synergy between the three functions.

3.2 The core roles and responsibilities of the Directorate can be summarised as:

- staff communications, engagement and involvement;
- managing the reputation of the organisation;
- media relations;
- FT membership recruitment and elections to the Members' Council;
- developing corporate fundraising;
- public relations;
- publicity campaigns;
- advising on the production of high-quality patient information;
- communications with commissioning Primary Care Trusts and GPs;
- managing and development the website and content of the intranet;
- public consultation and developing links with stakeholders;
- Trust identity and branding;
- advertising and sponsorship;
- ensuring the provision of high-quality staff, patient and public information;
- commissioning art, design and printing;
- developing a marketing strategy.

4. WHAT WE COMMUNICATE - KEY MESSAGES

4.1 If Poole Hospital is to communicate effectively with staff, patients and stakeholders, it is important that key messages are identified to ensure a clear and consistent approach.

4.2 These key messages should be based on the Trust's vision, its six supporting strategic aims and its business objectives.

Robust resource management

- 4.3 The NHS is publicly funded. We will manage our funds tightly without waste, adhering to the NHS core principles: that the NHS will provide a universal service for all based on clinical need, not ability to pay (**The NHS Plan**). Being an NHS Foundation Trust gives us new financial freedoms that will allow us to use surplus funds to further improve patient care.

Improving our patients' experiences

- 4.4 We recognise that **how** people are treated is just as important as the quality of the clinical care they receive and how quickly they are treated. Poole Hospital is a clean hospital, with friendly staff where patients are treated with courtesy and respect at all times.

Developing our staff and their leadership

- 4.5 Our staff are the 'lifeblood' of the organisation, and without their skills, hard work and commitment we cannot deliver high-quality patient care. It is important we care for them by offering a safe, flexible working environment and that we make full use of their valuable skills through training, development and educational opportunities.

Strengthening the governance and risk regimes

- 4.6 We put patient safety at the foremost of everything we do. Poole Hospital is a learning organisation where processes and procedures are put in place to maximise the quality of care and minimise risk.

Maintaining strong customer relationships

- 4.7 Poole Hospital is an outward looking organisation. We are open and honest and listen and respond to our staff, patients and stakeholders. As an NHS Foundation Trust, we will build on existing partnerships within our community and actively encourage staff, patients and local residents to become members, so that they can help to shape the service and make sure it meets the needs of those it serves.

Maximising economically sustainable clinical development opportunities

- 4.8 Poole Hospital provides high-quality services with short waiting times. It meets demand for services by planning ahead to make best use of available resources – whether they be staff, beds, operating theatres or clinic times. This means better patient care by cutting avoidable waiting times, shortening the time patients stay in hospital and reducing the risk of cancelled operations.

5. WHO WE COMMUNICATE WITH - KEY AUDIENCES

- 5.1 Poole Hospital will ensure that its communications are planned, relevant and targeted, and that we have identified our key audiences. Key audiences will cover internal, external and third party and stakeholder groups, but in practice there is considerable crossover between each of these. For example, a member of staff could also be a patient or a relative of a patient, or the reverse could be the case. This makes it all the more crucial that our messages are clear and consistent.

Internal Audiences

- Patients and carers;
- Relatives and friends of patients;
- Board of Directors;
- Staff;
- Trade Unions;
- Patient interest/support groups;
- League of Friends;
- Fundraisers;
- Volunteers.

External and stakeholder audiences

Health and Social Care

- Primary Care Trusts (PCTs);
- GPs and primary care teams;
- NHS South West;
- Department of Health;
- Other NHS Trusts;
- Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- Social services;
- Independent sector providers.

General

- Members of the Public;
- The media;
- Local authorities;
- Local community groups and amenities;
- Voluntary organisations;
- Local Industry;
- Universities, schools and colleges;
- MPs and MEPs.

NHS Foundation Trust

- Members and member representatives;
- Monitor;
- Foundation Trust Network (FTN).

Third parties with roles in relation to Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

These will include:

- Regulators of health professionals (GMC, Nursing and Midwifery Council etc);
- Charities Commission;
- Commission for Racial Equality;
- Disability Rights Commission;
- Equal Opportunities Commission;
- Health and Safety Executive;

- Information Commissioner;
- National Audit Office;
- Healthcare Commission;
- Health Service Ombudsman;
- Blood and Transplant Authority;
- Health Protection Agency;
- National Patient Safety Agency;
- NHS Litigation Authority;
- Royal Colleges.

6. HOW WE COMMUNICATE WITH OUR AUDIENCES

6.1 There are many mediums of communication which may be used to convey our messages to key audiences. These may be formal or informal; hi-tech or low tech; simple or sophisticated – there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution. In all of our communications we will select a medium – or media - to suit the message and the target audience. This may vary according to timing and circumstances. Examples of the some of the means of communication available to Poole Hospital are set out below. They are interchangeable and may be used to communicate with staff, patients, and members of the public or other stakeholders:

Face to face communications:

- focus groups;
- public meetings;
- annual general meeting;
- regular meetings of the Board of Directors, the Hospital Executive Committee and Council of Member Representatives;
- Joint Consultative Negotiating Committee;
- Medical Staffs Committee;
- media briefings; on to one meetings;
- staff and team meetings and briefings;
- conferences and other special events.

Written communications:

- letters to patients;
- Grapevine;
- Poole Hospital News Bulletin;
- FT Talkback and other newsletters;
- press coverage;
- posters and notice boards;
- agendas and minutes of meetings.

Electronic communications:

- telephone;
- e-mail;
- websites;
- intranet;
- conferences;
- pager, text messaging/alerts;
- radio and television;
- web casts and blogs.

7. WHAT WE NEED TO DO - ACTION TO BE TAKEN

7.1 The actions that we will take to deliver Poole Hospital's communications objectives are:

Staff communications

7.2 We want our staff to be ambassadors for Poole Hospital. In order for this to happen, we will listen to our staff and act on what they tell us. We will implement a number of measures that will help us get 'Back to Basics' in our staff communications with a greater emphasis on face-to-face communications. These will include:

- a new intranet, which is easy to use and keep to date;
- a monthly Trust-wide Team Briefing, with clear mechanisms for staff to feed back their views and performance measures to ensure that relevant and timely information is cascaded to all staff;
- standardised arrangements for communications at ward level;
- revised guidance on the use of e.mail;
- a weekly e-bulletin for Trust-wide information, with safeguards to ensure information reaches staff without access to a PC;
- regular 'Staff Conversations' style listening events on hot topics;
- open forums with the Chief Executive;
- an 'Employee of the Month' staff recognition scheme;
- regularly updated information on notice boards;
- the staff handbook.

External communications

7.3 We will continue promote the good reputation of Poole Hospital NHS Hospital Trust so that our patients, public and stakeholders are well informed about our successes and the developments that will influence their choice. This will be delivered through:

- a planned programme of publicity with key target dates relating to specific developments;
- working with the local and specialist media to actively publicise our successes to a wide audience and ensure robust rebuttal of inaccurate reporting;
- developing our public website in a dynamic way;
- implementing a new 'brand' for Poole Hospital that reflects its vision and values;
- timely publication of an annual report in line with guidance set down by Monitor;
- public awareness campaigns that support national and local events;
- community engagement resulting from our fundraising activities;

7.4 We will ensure that we provide with our commissioning PCTs and GP colleagues with good quality information about clinical and corporate developments and that will help to support the referral process. This will include:

- a monthly Poole Hospital News bulletin that will contain information on service developments, performance and access to services;
- a programme of clinical awareness events;
- web based information;
- a Directory of Services and Clinicians.

7.5 We will ensure that we have arrangements in place for the effective engagement of stakeholders and third party relationships. This will include:

- maintaining an active database of key stakeholders and organisations;
- providing a robust policy which includes processes and procedures for public consultation in line with obligations set out in section 242 of the NHS Act 2006;
- drawing up clear lines of communication with all of our stakeholder and third party organisations including new Local Involvement Networks (LINKs).

Membership communications

7.6 As an NHS Foundation Trust, we will ensure that we continue to attract more public members and maintain a representative membership. We will regularly review our Membership Recruitment and Retention Strategy with the Council of Member Representatives. We will make sure that our members are kept informed and engaged through:

- a quarterly newsletter, FT Talkback which is sent to all members;
- a programme membership events;
- regular meetings of CoMR Reference groups;
- participation in membership recruitment and fundraising activities.

8. SUPPORTING POLICIES

8.1 It is intended that this strategy will be supported by the following policies:

- Advertising and Sponsorship, which sets the principles for accepting and commissioning advertising and sponsorship;
- Media Relations, which sets out the arrangements in place for handling contacts with the media;
- Public Consultation, which will set out our processes and procedures for public consultation in line with obligations in line with section 242 of the NHS Act 2006;
- Management of the intranet, which will set out processes and procedures governing the storage of information on the intranet and public website.

9. SUMMARY

- 9.1 The communication strategy provides a framework for ensuring that our staff, patients, members of the public and stakeholders are informed, engaged and involved. It sets the out the guiding principles, clear objectives and key messages that are necessary to achieve these goals.
- 9.2 As a Foundation Trust, Poole Hospital is a much more outward looking organisation with responsibilities to communicate clearly with its external audiences.
- 9.3 We will to continue to raise the profile of Poole Hospital publicly and promote its reputation for providing first-class, patient-centred services; review and revise our Membership Strategy in order to attract more public members; and ensure that we have in place robust arrangements for public consultation in line with national guidance.
- 9.4 We will give greater emphasis to improving staff communications and engagement. A review of staff communications has highlighted a number of areas for improvement, which will be given priority and supported by a detailed action plan set out in Appendix A.

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