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# Media Relations Policy

## Aim of Policy

This model policy is drafted to help smaller care organisations develop effective media relations if they seek or need to do so. Larger organisations might well have specialist public relations sections or a dedicated media relations post. The purpose is to make clear where the responsibilities lie for engaging with the media and the importance of having a well managed and co-ordinated approach to all media relations and contacts.

## Policy Statement

From time to time, a care service could receive or seek the attention of the local or national press, radio or television. The care service might be proactive in seeking media contact, when for example, it wants to promote its provision or events or reactive to the interest shown by the media.

The reasons for having media contact could be positive — for example, when the service has something to celebrate or has won an award — or negative, following criticism or adverse events. In whatever kind of contact, the service must be aware of the potential impact on its users and its integrity and value as a business. It therefore requires a strategy to ensure that every media contact results in the most positive outcome possible for service users and the organisation.

The most effective way is to have a senior staff member (who might be the registered manager or a designated person — referred to here as the media relations manager) be responsible for all media contact and communications, possibly working with a small reference group to develop the organisation’s media relations’ strategy, which will have the following aims.

1. To contact the relevant media and develop its interest at the appropriate times and over the occasions when media interest would be important to promote the aims and achievements of the service. This might be achieved through press announcements and releases, inviting reporters to events and general alerts about current and forthcoming important events and occasions.
2. To respond to any interest in the activities of the service shown by the media, including where it receives adverse criticism or complaints or is subject to formal investigations as a result of events that have taken place within the service. The general aim here will be to protect the interests of the users of the service and the integrity and reputation of the organisation by being as open and transparent with the media and their respective audiences as the facts and circumstances permit. In these circumstances, the organisation sees its relationships with the media as a means of applying its duty of candour by releasing into the public domain accurate and relevant information about the events that have attracted media interest and attention.

The service considers that to develop effective media relations, it must ensure that the processes involved are well managed and co-ordinated so that it always speaks as one voice, with the information provided being clear and accurate and the risks of being misrepresented and misunderstood kept to a minimum.

## Procedures

To this end, all media contacts should be filtered through the media relations manager. The media relations manager will be responsible (with the appropriate support) for responding to or preparing a response to all media enquiries and interest, including press statements and releases.

The media relations manager will usually act as the spokesperson for the organisation or for arranging and managing any other spokesperson who can appropriately fill the role, which will depend on the issues that need to be communicated.

Individual staff must never field media enquiries on their own initiative. Their correct line of action to any approach or request from a media source will be to politely refer the enquirer to the media relations manager. It is important that they respond in this way to protect their interests so that they do not provide misleading or inaccurate responses, or breach data protection and confidentiality requirements.

Any staff member who provides information to the media without reference to the media relations’ manager will face disciplinary proceedings as they will be in likely breach of the service’s media relations policy. Anonymous reporting will always be thoroughly investigated to discover the possible sources of “leaked” information.

This policy does not negate in any way individual staff members’ rights and responsibilities to “whistleblow” if they have concerns or evidence of *unaddressed* misconduct within the service that is resulting in service users being harmed or remaining at risk of being harmed. If “whistleblowing” is necessary, the service would expect the first line of such action by the whistleblower contacting the Care Quality Commission or Local Authority Safeguarding Board, with the media being contacted only as a last resort. Suspected malicious or unproven media reporting would be investigated as misconduct and follow the disciplinary process.

## Training

All staff will receive training to follow this policy in the event of being contacted by the media. The training will include guidance and advice on appropriate ways of responding to unsolicited enquiries from journalists.

Staff responsible for dealing with the media in their designated or appointed roles will receive specialist training.

## Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis or in the light of recent experiences of dealing with the media.

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| Policy review date: | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |