



## **Standard Operating Procedure: Media Relations for HSE Employees**

In any healthy democracy an active media is an essential component, publicising the achievements and results but also frequently questioning the policies and actions of those in authority.

The HSE recognises that working with the media requires an appropriate response as the media can influence public opinion about the services provided by the HSE and the staff providing those services.

The HSE is committed to being open and proactive about promoting its role within Irish society. The HSE is also dedicated to protecting the reputation of staff and the privacy of patients and accordingly, the National Press Office also acts as a counter to negative commentary and unbalanced reportage of HSE services in the media.

As guardians of healthcare in Ireland, the HSE has a responsibility to inform and advise the public on health related matter and must be a trusted source of information.

### **What does the National Press Office do?**

They provide the wider health service with a professional service that comprises of public relations, reputation management, crisis management and risk assessment. Their functions include:

- Promoting a positive profile of the HSE and publicising achievements and reforms.
- Promoting all public health information campaigns
- Ensuring that the CEO and HSE's vision is carried through the media
- Protecting the integrity, credibility and reputation of the HSE and staff within media coverage of the health services
- Working with Hospital Groups and Community Healthcare Organisations' communications functions as required
- Media relations – to ensure balanced coverage in the media of the work of the HSE and the Irish Health Services
- Ensuring all media queries are answered promptly and accurately, reflecting policy, objectives, work and initiatives
- Liaising on all media relations with the Department of Health and other Government Departments, State agencies and public representatives
- Liaising with HSE staff on all media and communications matters
- Providing a support/advisory service to relevant staff members on communications issues
- Provision of out of hours service for media queries as required
- Arranging appropriate media interviews with staff and providing preparation and briefing support to interviewees
- Ensuring up to date monitoring of media coverage
- Maximising media coverage of a wide range of public functions and launches
- Supporting Communications Planning Group (CPG) projects

- Working with Digital and Social in creating content

### **When a Journalist Calls...**

For many staff it can be an unnerving experience to receive a call or email from a journalist directly.

Journalists are always obliged to identify themselves as such under the NUJ Code of Ethics and in almost all cases will do so.

Staff should refer the call/email to the local Community Healthcare Organisation/Hospital Group Communications Office in the first instance or the National Press Office if necessary. Communications staff are trained and experienced in dealing with all media and are there to provide staff with guidance and support.

Contact details for all [CHO](#) / [HG](#) and [national press office](#) communications staff is available at the following link: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/communications/media/>

Staff should remember that anything they do say to a journalist can be used and quoted and the staff member can be named. In order to protect staff, the reputation of the service and ensure patient confidentiality, the following protocols should provide some guidance;

- All media queries, including requests to take photographs or film, should be referred to the CHO/Hospital Group Communications Office in your area or to the National Press Office.
- All statements to be issued publicly should be cleared by a senior manager and the CHO/Hospital Group Communications office in your area.
- Any invitations to the media (or public events in the planning stage) should be issued by the CHO/Hospital Group Communications office in your area.
- Any knowledge of journalistic activity concerning a HSE matter should be notified to the CHO/Hospital Group Communications office in your area
- Any development which is certain to arouse significant media interest (positive or negative) should be notified firstly to the relevant senior manager and also to the National Press Office/ CHO/Hospital Group Communications office in your area.

### **Media Interviews**

The giving of interviews, statements or any other information connected with the services provided by any health service should not be undertaken without the prior approval of the National Press Office or your local CHO/Hospital Group Communications office.

This is to ensure that only accurate and authorised information is issued, and to ensure that any comments that are made in such interviews cannot be attributed as the official HSE position.

A clear procedure for dealing with interviews is necessary for all health service staff. This protects members of staff from being forced to make immediate comment and also enables the most up to date factual and contextual information to be provided. It also enables consistent and clear approach to be adopted regarding the HSE/Hospital Group/CHO viewpoint.

At times, members of staff may speak with the media as representatives of their professional association or trade union. This is acceptable but staff speaking in such a capacity must always ensure that such interviews and their comments are being made in the context of their association and are not representative of the HSE/Hospital Group/CHO.

Such interviews should not breach patient or work confidentiality.

### **Media Interviews Checklist**

When responding to a press query please use the following checklist:

- In the first instance, advise the journalist to make contact with the relevant communications office
- Take the journalist's name and organisation
- Establish the deadline
- Establish exactly what information the journalist is seeking
- Contact the CHO Communications Office or the National Press Office
- Agree a response and arrange for the National Press Office or Communications Manager to issue.

### **When the Communications Office Calls...**

When dealing with a media query, the National Press Office or your local CHO/Hospital Group Communications office team may need to contact members of staff for the necessary details. A response will then be prepared in conjunction with the service manager concerned which is then cleared/signed off at National Director/ local Head of Service level. The local Chief Officer should also be made aware of the response to be issued.

We endeavour to be as co-operative and facilitating as possible with the media. This means that our management of interviews, articles and all information must ensure the following:

- Our patients and clients confidentiality is protected at all times
- All information is accurate and up to date
- Each query is dealt with promptly
- Responses are cleared by a senior manager/National Director

As the media can operate to quite tight deadlines, staff should be aware that requests for information from a Press Officer need to be dealt within such deadlines.

Media is now a 24/7 cycle and deadlines can vary from a couple of minutes for an online/social media to a couple of days. The Press Officer contacting you will specify the deadline he/she is working to.

Staff should inform the Press Officer if there is a difficulty meeting that deadline as soon as possible so the press office can manage the expectations of the journalist.

A prompt reply and assistance to the Press Office maximises the input the HSE/CHO/Hospital Group may have in any given story. No information or a late response may lead to a story reflecting unfairly on staff or services.

### **What to do if the media present on HSE premises seeking interviews or photographs?**

The Media are obliged not to conduct Interviews, filming or photography on HSE premises without the prior approval of the National Press Office/ CHO/Hospital Group Communications office in your area.

Any filming or recording of staff and patients requires strict adherence to signing Public Liability, Indemnity and Consent forms.

Where the media contact the Communications office to seek permission to film or take photographs of a HSE premises, the Communications office will consult with the relevant manager. If permission is

granted the Communications office will make the appropriate arrangements. Where possible a member of the Communications team will be present on the day to facilitate and manage the media.

If the media present on HSE premises seeking interviews/photographs, without prior approval, you should inform them that it is HSE policy that all media requests are referred to the CHO/Hospital Group Communications office in your area or to the National Press Office.

You should give them contact details for your Communications office and you should also contact your Communications office immediately to advise that the media are present at your premises/location.

### **Patient/Client Confidentiality**

The HSE places great emphasis on the need for strictest confidentiality in respect of our patients and clients. Every patient and client in the care of the HSE is entitled to the reassurance that the HSE will not comment on the particular circumstances of their case or engage in public debate on private matters or permit to them being photographed or other media intrusion while in our care without permission.

Maintaining a client's confidentiality is not only an ethical requirement for the HSE, it is also a legal requirement as defined in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) along with the Data Protection Acts 1988-2018. When a client or family makes personal information public, this does not relieve the HSE of its duty to preserve/uphold client confidentiality at all times.

### **Protected Disclosures of information in the workplace (whistleblowing)**

The HSE is committed to hearing from and responding to concerns raised by staff. Arrangements for dealing with Protected Disclosures, more commonly known as whistleblowing, have been in place since 2009 under the provisions of the Health Act 2004 (as amended). More recently the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 has been enacted.

Responsibility for leading the Protected Disclosures process transferred to the QAV Division in January 2016. The contact details for the HSE Authorised Person for Protected Disclosures have been retained and are as follows:

**Post:** Office of the Authorised Person, PO Box 11571, Dublin 2

**Tel:** 071 9834651 *\*Office hours: 10am to 1pm & 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday*

**E-mail:** [protected.disclosures@hse.ie](mailto:protected.disclosures@hse.ie)

Work is underway in conjunction with relevant managers to update HSE guidance documentation and arrangements for the operation of the Protected Disclosures process. Further communication will issue in due course. Any queries you may have can be directed in confidence to the Office of the Authorised Person. Click [here](#) to locate the Protected Disclosures of Information Form

### **Good Faith Reporting**

Staff may call the Raising a Concern in the Workplace Information Hotline (01-6626984) to report a concern using the HSE Good Faith Reporting (GFR) policy

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/qid/quality-and-patient-safety-documents/goodfaithfinal.pdf>

In addition to the HSE Protected Disclosure of Information policy, the Good Faith Reporting (GFR) policy allows people to voice concerns anonymously, about possible improprieties pertaining to financial, clinical or social services. Thus, issues raised are documented but names are not used if requested not to do so. Assurance will be sought from the National Director(s) that the concern has been investigated and is being managed.

Contact details for your local Communications contacts are available to view here:  
<http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/contact/>