



NHS Borders Media Relations Policy

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Date distributed: January 2011

Review Date: January 2012

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1 Introduction

The public have a great interest in the health services, both locally and as part of NHS Scotland, and NHS Borders has an obligation to respond to any questions and concerns the public may have. The media provides the route by which the public gain most of their information about the NHS and is, therefore, one of the strongest channels of communication we have with the public. It is important to develop relationships with the media that will benefit both parties.

It is reasonable to expect the media to want to report on areas of public interest and as an organisation we should respond openly, while maintaining confidentiality for our patients and staff when appropriate. The more accurate and informative we are, the less room there will be for misinterpretation which could lead to unreasonable concern within the community.

NHS Borders also needs to use this communication route to promote the organisation. The media will respond positively to our requests for publicity if we can maintain good relationships with them. In this way, we will be able to use this route to help keep the public informed of issues we feel it is important for them to know.

2 Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure that press enquires are dealt with in accordance with established policy, whilst creating and maintaining a good public image of the NHS Borders.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Designated Officer

The Head of Public Involvement and Communications, based at Newstead, is the Designated Officer and Lead Director responsible for dealing with enquiries from the media. Please contact the Head of Public Involvement & Communications Team on 01896 828231.

3.2 Executive Director On Call

The Executive Director On Call will be responsible for dealing with enquiries from the media out-of-hours or in the absence of the Head of Public Involvement & Communications. The Executive Director on Call can be contacted through the BGH switchboard (01896 826000).

3.3 Media Liaison – Public Involvement and Communications Team

The Public Involvement & Communications (PI&C) team will, during office hours, act as first point of contact for the media, and for members of staff passing on media enquiries or for advice in preparing media releases for events where the media will be in attendance or invited. Public Involvement & Communications staff can be contacted on extension 5520 or 5589 at Newstead (direct dial 01896 825520/5589).

3.4 All Staff

In order to co-ordinate communications, it is important that any member of staff who is approached for information or comment by the media informs the Head of Public Involvement and Communications, or a member of the PI&C team before responding to the enquiry.

If a member of staff is approached by the media, it is most likely that the media are seeking their opinion as a member of staff. If staff are approached as a

member of the public, they should make it clear that their response is a personal one and in no way reflects the views of NHS Borders as an organisation.

3.5 Union and Other Official Staff Representatives

All staff representatives should inform the Head of Public Involvement and Communications or a member of the PI&C team prior to communicating with the media. It is important that NHS Borders is given the opportunity to respond to any statements made to the media by staff representatives. The Head of Public Involvement & Communications and the team will ensure that press statements and releases relating to matters of interest to staff representatives will be copied to them so that they have the opportunity to comment.

In making statements to the media, staff representatives should make it clear that they are expressing the views of their staff group and this may not necessarily reflect the views of NHS Borders.

4. Operational System

A flow chart is provided in Appendix 1: Protocol for Handling Media Enquiries

4.1 Procedure For Responding To Media Enquiries

Members of staff should not respond to media enquiries without consulting Head of Public Involvement & Communications, or a member of the PI&C Team.

In certain services, such as the Public Health Department, media liaison is well established. In such areas, it is expedient for media enquiries to be dealt with by that department following local procedures. In these circumstances, it would only be necessary to inform the Public Involvement & Communications Department of the enquiry for monitoring and awareness purposes.

Where the enquiry is for a patient condition report, medical and nursing staff are able to respond directly to the enquiry without reference to the Public Involvement & Communications staff (see Section 4.2).

If contacted by someone claiming to be a member of staff seeking information and you are not sure of their identity, take their name and post title, check their identity and call them back using the internal phone directory or switchboard.

4.1.1 During working hours, 08.45-17.00 Monday to Friday, refer the call to the Public Involvement & Communications staff.

4.1.2 If a media enquiry is received outwith working hours, take the message and inform the caller they will be contacted during working hours. Pass the enquiry on to Public Involvement & Communications staff.

If the matter requires a more urgent response, contact the Senior Manager on-call via the BGH Switchboard. The Senior Manager on-call will contact the Executive Director On Call who will manage the enquiry.

4.1.3 In dealing with the media, NHS Borders will pay regard to the *Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002*, the *NHS Code of Practice on Protecting Patient Confidentiality* and policies on confidentiality and raising concerns and complaints.

4.1.4 When presented with a media enquiry, the Head of Public Involvement and Communications or member of their team will decide whether they need further information or to consult colleagues in order to respond. They will consult colleagues as necessary.

- 4.1.5 The Head of Public Involvement and Communications and senior colleagues will decide how much information to release to the media, with advice from PI&C. An informed decision can only be made in light of the information available to them, so when approached for assistance by NHS Borders' representative dealing with a media enquiry, members of staff are requested to give as much relevant information as possible, as quickly as possible.
- 4.1.6 In the light of the information the Head of Public Involvement and Communications or a member of their team obtains, a statement or information for the representatives of the media is drawn up.
- 4.1.7 Consultation with relevant Senior Managers and Board Executive Team will be undertaken prior to the release of the statement.
- 4.1.8 In the event of an incident that is likely to have an impact on staff, patients or relatives of patients, these groups will be made aware of the media interest and NHS Borders response prior to releasing a press statement.
- 4.1.9 In the event of a major incident, the protocol for managing the media contained in the Major Incident Plan will be followed.
- 4.1.10 All press releases should be discussed with a member of the PI&C team who will offer advice and/or issue as required.

4.2 Patient Related Condition Reports

NHS Borders first responsibility is to its patients. An important part of this responsibility is confidentiality. Patients have a right to expect that their presence in hospital, or any medical treatment they are receiving, will not be made public knowledge. They also have a right to expect that the details of their condition or any circumstances relating to their admission or discharge will not be made public. Under the Data Protection Act 1998, staff must observe patient confidentiality at all times (see NHS Code of Practice on Protecting Patient Confidentiality). This duty of confidentiality extends to patient's relatives as well.

- 4.2.1 The need to protect confidentiality is one specific reason why NHS Borders might decide not to respond to a press enquiry or only respond partially. Patients and relatives must give consent for any information to be given to the media. Patients and relatives should be made aware that giving consent to release information is a matter of choice and NHS Borders will respect and abide by their decision.
- 4.2.2 On receipt of a media enquiry for a condition report, staff should pass the request to senior nursing or medical staff according to local operating procedures for that site. However, if staff have any concerns regarding the enquiry, they should refer it through the process outlined in Section 4.1.
- 4.2.3 If the request is for general information following an incident or accident, such as to find out how many patients have been admitted, NHS Borders will not make any comment. Details will be confirmed by the police at the appropriate time. A statement is provided in Appendix 2 which can be issued in these circumstances.
- 4.2.4 If the journalist does not know the name of the patient(s) he is enquiring about NHS Borders will not give out any information. There is a risk that there might be more than one patient in the hospital with the same condition and incorrect information may be given.

- 4.2.5 If the journalist knows the identity of the patient or some of the patient's circumstances, information may be given to the media with the patient's (or relative's) consent and NHS Borders' responsibility for confidentiality does not alter. Even if the journalist is seeking confirmation, further information or an update on the patient's condition, confidentiality must be observed and consent to release the information must be obtained.
- 4.2.6 When a statement is given, it should not prejudice any patient in any way or give specific details about a patient's condition. Statements should be kept simple such as, 'the patient has been treated in casualty, and is comfortable/making a satisfactory recovery/critically ill.'
- 4.2.7 The PI&C team should be notified immediately of any information issues to a member of the media in regard to a patient's condition.

4.3 Patient Related Requests For Interview

- 4.3.1 NHS Borders is normally prepared to convey to patients and relatives a request for information or interview on behalf of the media, depending on the patient's condition. Patients and relatives must be made aware that it is their choice and NHS Borders will abide by their decision.
- 4.3.2 NHS Borders will not ordinarily convey a request for information or interview on behalf of the media to bereaved relatives or to relatives of a patient who is seriously ill. The latter circumstances will require the exercise of judgement.

4.4 Patient Related Complaints

- 4.4.1 NHS Borders may be required to comment when a patient has made their complaint public through the media. NHS Borders may make a general comment or deny any allegations. However patient confidentiality still applies. NHS Borders will advise the complainant of the processes available to them for pursuing their complaint should they wish to do so.
- 4.4.2 If the matter has already been raised with NHS Borders as a complaint, NHS Borders makes no comment other than to confirm that a complaint has been made. No comment can be made to the press until the complainant has received a formal response from NHS Borders.
- 4.4.3 If the matter has not already been raised with NHS Borders then NHS Borders will state that the issue will be investigated through the relevant channels should the individual choose to contact us.
- 4.4.4 Any inquiry from the media in relation to a complaint should immediately be referred to the PI&C team who will issue a response on behalf of NHS Borders.

4.5 Other issues

- 4.5.1 NHS Borders is always prepared to comment on and give information about its plans and services. Often an enquiry relates to an issue or allegation that has been passed to the media directly. NHS Borders wants to ensure that any facts in the public domain are accurate and accurately represented and will respond openly in these cases.
- 4.5.2 NHS Borders will always seek to avoid commenting publicly on a matter of relevance to NHS Borders staff before staff have been informed of the matter directly through the relevant channels.

4.6 Circumstances Where Comment Will Be Avoided

4.6.1 Human Resources Matters

Staff have a right to expect that matters relating to their own individual employment with NHS Borders are a matter between them and their employer. NHS Borders does not comment on these unless exceptional circumstances prevail.

4.6.2 Legal Matters

NHS Borders does not comment on matters that are, will be, or are likely to be, the subject of a legal or similar process, e.g. claims for compensation against NHS Borders and claims to be heard before an industrial tribunal.

4.7 Publicity

NHS Borders engage the media in raising public awareness. This includes providing press releases, briefings and opportunities for the press to take photographs in order to publicise new services, events held for the benefit of staff and fund raising initiatives. NHS Borders will take every opportunity to promote events taking place at our facilities.

To ensure a co-ordinated approach is maintained, staff should inform the Head of P&C or the PI&C team immediately of any event to which they would like to invite the media. This will ensure consistent messages are communicated to the public. An individual event may also provide a valuable opportunity to publicise wider issues.

4.7.1 Staff should inform the Head of PI&C/PI&C team of an event or opportunity where the media could be invited to provide publicity or improve public awareness. The Head of PI&C/PI&C team will inform the senior officials.

4.7.2 The Head of Public Involvement & Communications and Public Involvement & Communications staff should be informed well in advance of any event to which the press are to be invited. They will provide advice and support as appropriate to promote the event to the media and manage media interest.

5 Working with partner agencies

NHS Borders works closely with a wide range of partner agencies, locally, regionally and nationally, to deliver services or initiatives and to maintain the health and wellbeing of Borders' communities.

5.1 Locally NHS Borders works with partner agencies, such as Scottish Borders Council or the WRVS. NHS Borders will liaise with such agencies, as required, over the media management of joint issues and to promote joint service and initiatives.

5.2 Regionally, NHS Borders is part of the Lothian and Borders Strategic Coordinating Group with also involves NHS Lothian, all Lothian Local Authorities, Fire, Police and Scottish Borders Council. NHS Borders will liaise with these agencies, as required, over the media or communications management of joint issues and to promote joint services and initiatives.

NHS Borders also works with this group to provide a co-ordinate a response to an emergency in the Lothian and Borders area.

NHS Borders will also work with neighbouring health boards over the media or communications management of joint issues or to promote joint services or initiatives.

- 5.3 Nationally NHS Borders work with a range of agencies including the Scottish Government, Scottish Health Council, NHS Scotland along with all other NHS and Special Boards and Volunteer Development Scotland. NHS Borders will liaise with these agencies, as required, over the media or communications management of joint issues and to promote joint service and initiatives.

NHS Borders will also work with these agencies to a co-ordinate a response to a crisis or emergency situation as required.

6 Monitoring of the Policy

The effectiveness of, and adherence to this policy can be monitored by the following methods.

1. Review of press coverage.
2. Analysis of individual media events.
3. Feedback from media advisors.

7 Reference documents

Borders General Hospital Major Incident Procedures, Press Section.

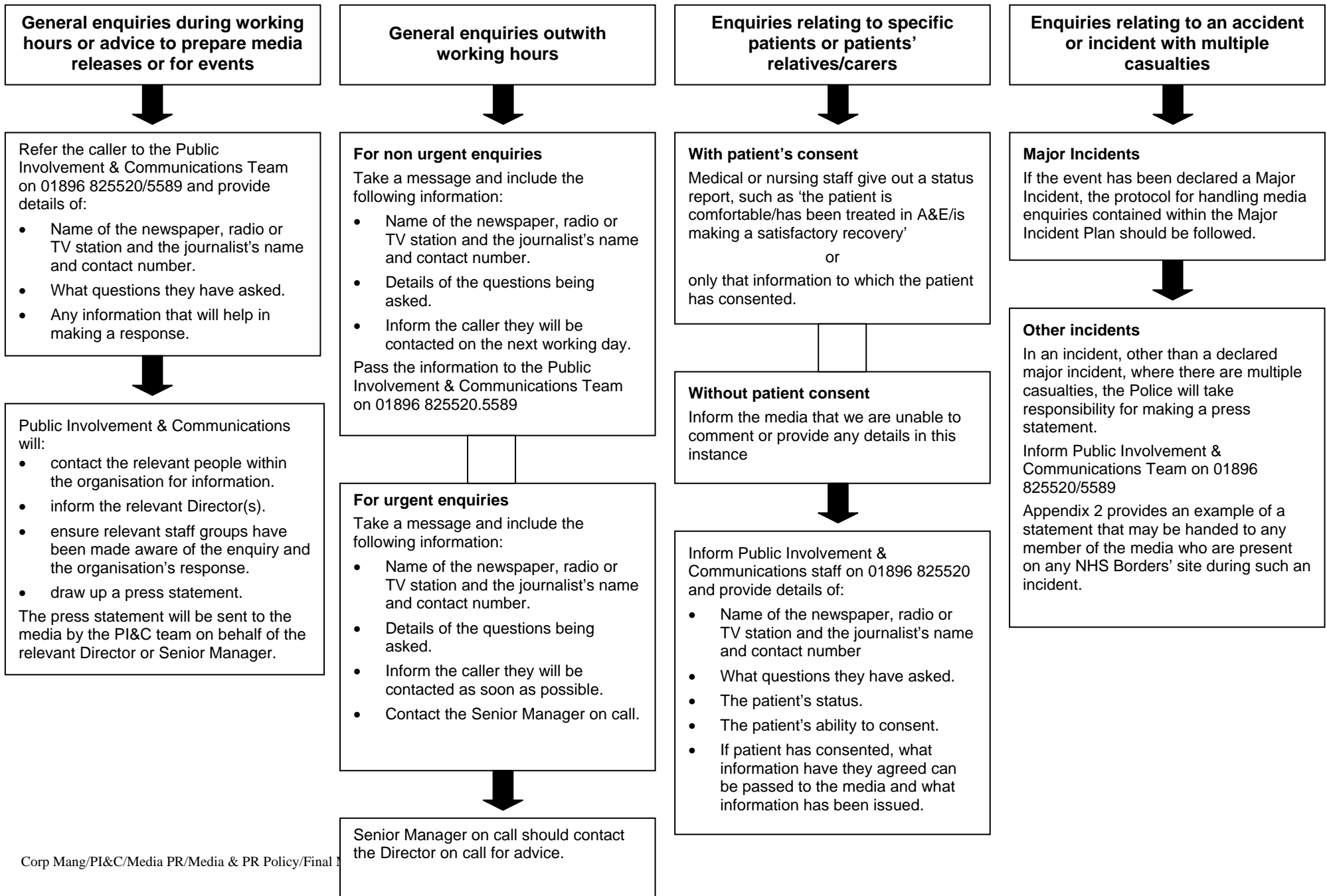
NHS Code of Practice on Protecting Patient Confidentiality – Scottish Executive

Code of Practice on Openness in the NHS in Scotland – Scottish Executive

Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

Data Protection Act 1998

Protocol for Handling Media Enquiries



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Media Information

NHS Borders is unable to issue any information regarding the incident that occurred today and the status of any individual being treated.

Lothian & Borders Police will issue information to the media as it becomes available.

We would appreciate your help to minimise the disruption to our services at this time. Please co-operate with any requests made by NHS Borders staff.

Thank you

Public Involvement and Communications