

Title: News Media Policy

Manual: Management

Section: Public Affairs

Document Number:

Issuing Authority: Senior Leadership Team

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PURPOSE:

Process for releasing information regarding the BCHS to the media.

POLICY STATEMENT:

Brant Community Healthcare System recognizes that health care is an important subject, especially to the people we serve. BCHS is committed to accountability, transparency and openness and the need to balance these principles with protection of the privacy rights of our patients and their expectations of confidentiality.

The BCHS News Media Policy outlines the responsibilities of BCHS, and the news media focused on ensuring the best possible balanced, responsive news coverage related to BCHS issues, events, and interests through a positive working relationship between BCHS and the media.

This policy applies to all BCHS Board members, employees, professional staff, and volunteers.

DEFINITION (S):

None.

PROCEDURE:

Policy

Positive, balanced news coverage helps to build a positive reputation of our hospitals.

Protecting the privacy of our patients and meeting their confidentiality expectations is the highest priority for BCHS. We strictly follow regulations set out in the Personal Health Information Protection Act (2004) and Freedom of Information and Privacy Act R.O.

As such, BCHS has the right to put measures in place to ensure fair, balanced, and unbiased representation in the news media of its employees, professional staff, programs, and services.

It is the responsibility of the BCHS Corporate Communications and Public Affairs department to lead media relations activities for BCHS and to act as the official news source and principal contact for all communication between BCHS and the media. Communications and Public Affairs ensures media inquiries are managed professionally and effectively with responses that are timely and accurate.

Only individuals authorized specifically through Corporate Communications and Public Affairs will be permitted to speak to news media on behalf of BCHS.

Hospital Spokespersons

Media Code – Guidelines for Hospital Spokespersons

BCHS designates official spokespersons for the organization. Only authorized spokespersons may speak publicly on behalf of BCHS in an official capacity. The President and CEO and Vice President of Communications are authorized to designate “official” spokespersons.

The Board Chair will be the spokesperson for matters related to the President and CEO and their performance, compensation, recruitment, etc. All other organizational matters are addressed in the media by the President and CEO, or as designated by the CEO or Vice President of Communications.

Media matters related to the BCHS Foundation, its Board of Directors, operations, or fundraising activities will be referred to the Executive Director of the BCHS Foundation for comment.

For matters related to BCHS organizational performance, reputation, and administrative policy matters, the most senior official with responsibility for the subject matter will serve as spokesperson when available.

For medical subject matter, the senior clinical leader within BCHS may act as spokesperson.

A member of the Corporate Communications and Public Affairs department act as media spokesperson as needed to provide background and/or routine information, or when deemed appropriate.

Media Guidelines

The BCHS Corporate Communications and Public Affairs department is the main point of contact between the organization and members of the news media.

Media must channel all requests for information and/or interviews, photography and video shots through the Corporate Communications and Public Affairs department. Members of the media should contact Corporate Communications by telephone or email, and **prior to visiting the hospital**, so that arrangements can be made to facilitate requests for interviews and photographs in a timely and efficient manner, according to the following protocol:

- During regular business hours:
 - Email: Communications@bchsys.org
 - Telephone: 519-751-5544 x4927
- During evenings and weekends:
 - Call 519-751-5544 ext. 0 (Switchboard) and ask for the on-call administrator

The decision to address these requests will be made by Corporate Communications in consultation with the appropriate administrative leaders, physicians, staff and patients and their families if/when appropriate.

Media representatives must clearly identify themselves to BCHS employees and professional staff when they are acting in an official, professional capacity as a member of the news media, whether in person, by telephone or digitally.

Media Code – Guidelines for Hospital Spokespersons

To ensure patient confidentiality, privacy, and appropriate sensitivity to all BCHS patients and families, reporters, film crews and photographers acting in a professional capacity must contact Corporate Communications before entering BCHS property.

Media representatives must be accompanied by a Corporate Communications team member or designate while on BCHS property.

In addition, the media must first notify the Corporate Communications department before interviewing, photographing, filming, or making an audio recording or videotape of a BCHS patient. Signed patient consent obtained by the Corporate Communications Department is required by BCHS.

Physicians and staff must provide their permission through written or verbal consent through the Communications Department before any member of the media can feature them in an audio or video recording, filming, photograph(s) or interview.

The media is not permitted to enter patient care areas or other restricted areas without obtaining advance authorization from the Communications department.

The goal of Communications and Public Affairs will be providing open and equitable access to all members of the news media within the limits of this policy.

BCHS does not guarantee exclusivity of any story for any media representative.

Guidelines for Patients

In matters of public record – for example, police or fire department involvement in an accident – the policy of BCHS is to provide a one-word description of a patient's condition in response to media requests, unless the patient has specified in writing that no information be released. A standard generic description e.g. critical, serious, good, fair, treated and released will be used. Under no circumstances will BCHS provide other patient information.

No information will be released on patients being treated for mental health and/or addiction, sexual assault, or domestic violence.

High-profile patients, including public figures or those well known to the media, may be advised to have information about their condition released by their own sources. In these cases, Corporate Communications will refer all media to that source.

Patients who are approached by Corporate Communications to be interviewed, recorded, photographed, or videotaped by the news media, or who wish to discuss their personal health condition with the news media while being treated by BCHS must sign a Patient/Employee Consent for Photo/Interview Form before being in contact with the media.

All measures necessary will be taken by Corporate Communications and BCHS staff to maintain the confidentiality of all other patients of BCHS who are not involved in the media contact, and who have not initiated a media contact previously.

Media Code – Guidelines for Hospital Spokespersons

Directing Media Inquiries

The BCHS Corporate Communications and Public Affairs department is staffed weekdays, Monday to Friday.

After hours, on weekends and holidays, if the Director On-Call receives BCHS media requests, they should:

- Contact Corporate Communications for assistance for urgent matters through Switchboard, or
- Advise the media to contact Corporate Communications the next business day for non-urgent matters.

Media requests during evenings, weekends and holidays related to matters defined as routine will be addressed during regular weekday hours when appropriate resources are available to assist.

General Guidelines for BCHS Employees, Physicians and Volunteers

BCHS staff, physicians and volunteers must refer all media requests promptly to the Corporate Communications and Public Affairs department without comment. Corporate Communications will clarify the request and identify the appropriate spokesperson as required and provide general assistance in accordance with BCHS media policies and procedures.

Any employee or member of the medical staff who is not a designated spokesperson is not permitted to present themselves as designated BCHS spokespersons.

All news releases and media advisories are approved and released through Corporate Communications and Public Affairs.

Guidelines for Release of Information Regarding Patient Condition Inquiries

Only upon the request of Corporate Communications and Public Affairs will staff and/or physicians provide generic patient condition reports – e.g. critical, serious, good, fair, treated and released – of patients in police and accident cases of public record.

IMPORTANT NOTE: This information will only be provided if the media representative has a specific name. Patients may request no release of information to which BCHS will comply.

Employees and/or physicians must notify Corporate Communications when a patient:

- a) Requests release of condition other than Critical, Serious, Good, Fair, Treated and Released
- b) Requests that no condition reports be released to the news media
- c) Is to be interviewed, recorded, photographed or videotaped by the news media. Patient consent is obtained by having the patient sign a Patient/Employee Consent for Photo/Interview Form which must be sent through interoffice mail or dropped off at the Corporate Communications and Public Affairs office located in H wing.

Media Code – Guidelines for Hospital Spokespersons

During evenings, weekends and holidays, the Director On-Call must be advised of the patient's wishes by contacting them through Switchboard.

When informal requests for privacy/confidentiality policy information or data are received from the media, Communications and Public Affairs will refer all requests to the Chief Privacy Officer for official recording purposes.

Breaches

Any breaches of this policy – especially those of a serious nature – will be referred to the Chief of Communications for action.

Definitions of Patient Conditions

- a) Critical condition: the patient's prognosis is questionable; vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits, and there are major complications.
- b) Serious condition: the patient is acutely ill; his/her vital signs may be unstable and not within normal limits, and there is a chance for improved diagnosis.
- c) Good condition: the patient's vital signs are stable and within normal limits; the patient is conscious, and his/her prognosis is good or excellent.
- d) Fair condition: the patient's vital signs give no cause of concern; the patient is conscious, and the prognosis is favourable, but he/she may be uncomfortable or have minor complications.
- e) Treated and released: the patient has been treated and discharged from the hospital.

RELATED PRACTICES AND / OR LEGISLATIONS:

Personal Health Information Protection Act (2004); Freedom of Information and Privacy Act R.0

REFERENCES:

None.

APPENDICES:

None.