External Communications

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to outline the Trust’s current external communications activity and proposals for the communications function supporting the Trust to achieve our strategic aims:

- maintaining and developing orthopaedic specialisation
- providing high quality clinical services underpinned by strong outcomes
- building academic strength
- expanding our external profile

The recommendations within this paper will inform our new communications strategy which will be developed during 2013 and forms part of the engagement and communications workstream of the Trust’s organisational development programme.

2. Best Practice

Best practice in external communications is where every message is consistent with the organisation’s vision and objectives. Whilst challenging, this is not impossible, provided all parties involved in delivering messages beyond the confines of the organisation have insight into the vision and objectives and utilise appropriate expertise to deliver their message.

Provision of high quality communications expertise is essential to:

- achieve our organisational objectives
- engage with our stakeholders
- demonstrate the success of our work
- ensure people understand what we do
- change behaviour and perceptions, where necessary

the communications function needs to work closely with the redevelopment, service transformation and Foundation Trust project teams to ensure that external communications are consistent with, and support the activities and progress of those programmes.

3. Current provision

The communications team is led by the Head of Corporate Affairs, Learning and Development whose remit incorporates internal and external communications, corporate learning and development, medical education and diversity. The team consists of a Communications Manager and Communications Administrator as well as a new role of Communications Coordinator.

The team coordinate both internal and external communications activities. These include media relations, staff and public events, online presence, staff engagement as well as coordinating a plethora of publications.

In 2013 alone, the team has undertaken the following:
Organised two Trust-wide events – Dragons’ Den and Your Voice, Our Ears – both very well attended and appreciated by staff, with several events planned for the rest of the year.

Coordinated over 170 projects which involved the design, publication and distribution of publications ranging from the Trust’s annual report and quality account to patient information leaflets, conference posters for clinicians and publicity materials.

Handled over 1,350 enquiries via the enquiries e-mailbox. These have included many enquiries from patients abroad seeking treatment and patients wishing to change or cancel their appointments.

Coordinated all the Trust’s Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.

Supported the Trust’s enabling programmes (redevelopment and transformation) – as well as supported departments e.g. Private Patients’ Unit to enhance their publicity materials and online presence.

Maintained the Trust’s Foundation Trust membership database, undertaken mailshots to members and provided communications support to the programme board.

Managed the Trust’s website.

Managed a series of e-mailboxes in addition to the general enquiries mailbox: FOI, Say So (the Trust’s suggestion scheme), Foundation Trust.

Coordinated filming onsite and managed numerous media enquiries including journalists seeking expert opinions on their stories, as well as the PR work in conjunction with Grayling.

Monitored media coverage and provided the Trust Board with monthly updates.

Undertaken internal communications activities such as developing the Trust’s intranet, communications to all staff via email and messageboards, producing screensavers to promote events, policy updates and advice to staff.

The Trust’s communications service is supplemented by:

- Out of hours/crisis management support from Jonathan Street PR (£425 p.m.)
- Proactive PR activity through Grayling PR (average £6k p.m.)

4. Performance of current provision

The Trust has not had to utilise the crisis management services of Jonathan Street PR in the last two years; out of hours media activity has been minimal.
Grayling PR have worked with the Trust for the past 10 months, supporting public affairs activity up to our successful planning application for the hospital rebuild. In addition, they have worked closely with the communications team and consultants from a number of clinical units to generate media interest. Up to April 2013, Grayling achieved the following:

Generated 52 pieces of positive media coverage across a wide range of national, trade and regional titles. Outputs included:

- 11 national print/online
- 33 regional print/online
- One regional TV broadcast
- Seven trade print/online
- 13 press releases developed
- Three opinion pieces/blogs developed
- Briefings with 17 RNOH consultants to generate news stories

Since then Grayling have continued to work with the Trust team to secure coverage of stories, most recently the use of the PedCAT scanning equipment which has had world-wide reach and achieved 72 pieces of coverage as well as 160,000 viewings of Mr Andy Goldberg’s YouTube film clip.

5. Summary of current status

The small communications team has built up a reputation in the Trust for providing a responsive, flexible service to managers and staff across the Trust. The blend of internal and external communications expertise has ensured an ability to identify and use opportunities to raise our profile and engage staff.

The Trust faces busy and challenging years ahead with implementation and delivery of three significant enabling programmes to secure the Trust’s future – redevelopment, organisational development and transformation – in addition to our ambition to become a Foundation Trust in 2014/15 and the external communications activity required to support the emerging business development opportunities.

The communications function has a key role to play in achieving the aim to “expand our external profile” as well as communicating our achievement of the other strategic aims.

6. Proposals for the future

The media consistently seek a human interest angle for stories which may not sit comfortably with our strategic objectives, for example consumer-oriented stories which have high audience reach but do not focus on the specialist nature of our work. Consequently, we have identified the following principles for accepting future media pieces. News/feature items should:

- Raise our profile as a specialist orthopaedic centre
• Be aligned to our strategic aims – specialisation, outcomes, academic profile and reputation

• Support the fundraising campaign

• Support the work of individual clinicians - those individual clinicians and other staff affected are willing to be involved

• Avoid excessive input which diverts clinicians from their work

• Ensures the privacy of our patients and the integrity of our work

• Contribute to our service development ambitions (e.g. RNOH @)

7. Technology

There are many social media platforms, the most well-known being Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. We currently use Twitter and LinkedIn to promote news stories; access to these sites is limited to the communications team via the Trust’s network, although staff are able to use their personal mobile devices to access these sites using the Trust’s WiFi network, for which a fee applies. There is considerable scope to develop our online presence via social media and we are currently writing a policy to outline our intention to promote these social media platforms. Expanded use might include:

• targeted recruitment

• blogs from the Chief Executive and other interested staff

• expanded programme of messages on Twitter etc. as well as the possibility of engaging with staff via social media e.g. to provide regular reminders of how RNOH teams and individuals are making a difference

An important factor in the success of using social media is the need to monitor activity so that we can keep our uploads fresh and respond to online correspondence in a timely way. This will require dedicated resource to ensure that online activity is kept up-to-date as well as a change in policy on access to social media in the workplace, hence the creation of the communications coordinator role. The coordinator will provide resource for expanded activity via social media, development of the website and support for staff in maximising utilisation of Grapevine (the Trust’s intranet) to contribute to the Trust’s profile and support, for example, our service development ambitions.

We have a well-established website; website traffic has doubled in two years. The site requires frequent updates and is currently being redeveloped to improve accessibility via mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Recent work has included enhancing consultant profiles online and promoting the research and development section in the website hierarchy. Future projects include supporting the information platform project (funded by the Trust’s innovation fund) as well as enhancing our presence on other websites such as NHS Choices.
8. Conclusions and recommendations

It is clear that we need to continue to provide a pro-active internal and external communications service, supporting the Trust to articulate a clear, compelling narrative that supports and furthers the Trust’s strategic aims and is supported by innovative and well-resourced approaches. To this end, it is recommended that we supplement the current communications resource within the Trust and reconfigure external support as follows:

- Engage Grayling PR on an ad hoc basis to continue to seek out stories from clinicians and work with target media to achieve coverage, where potential stories meet the criteria set out in section 6 above – recommend a fee cap of c. £4k per month

- Establish stronger links between fundraising PR and Trust-wide PR activity to maximise potential coverage in the media and support the fundraising campaign

- Review the Trust’s website contract to ensure robust support for its ongoing development

- Cease the contract with Jonathan Street PR and introduce a new arrangement for communications support as follows:
  - Communications team from 09.00 – 17.00, Monday to Friday
  - Out of hours – calls directed to the switchboard for onward reference to senior manager and/or director on call and update provided to the communications team at the earliest opportunity. Ad hoc support can be provided by the Head of Corporate Affairs, Learning and Development on the rare occasions that this might be required. The Executive Directors have already attended media training.

The Board is invited to review and approve these recommendations.