NESC Protocol for the Handling of Media Enquiries

Incorporating Oxford and Wessex Deanery

Date: February 2009
The handling of media enquiries

a.) Media enquiries regarding a previously unknown situation

1. The potential for direct media enquiries to NESC is limited. However, should the situation arise, all media calls should be referred to the office of the appropriate Deanery Business Manager or Department Head.

2. The Business Manager/Department Head will not give a response to the media immediately and will take a contact number and agree to get back to the media representative within reasonable time, noting carefully their deadlines for publication or broadcast. (This may be important if it is likely that something could be printed or broadcast without a suitable response from the NHS.)

3. The Business Manager/Department Head will establish the relevance of the enquiry to the Deanery or NESC Department (ie is it to do with the business and training remit of that part of the organisation.)

4. If the call has a relevance to the Deanery or Department, the Business Manager/Department Head will first inform the Dean or appropriate lead and the Director about the enquiry and may also need to take a briefing from one or more of them. The Business Manager/Department Head will keep them briefed as the situation develops.

5. The Business Manager/Department Head will establish the facts of the situation as soon as possible and provide a clear briefing to the SCSHA. If the issue is complex and the full details are not immediately available the SCSHA Communications Team will be briefed in very broad outline as soon as possible.

6. The Business Manager/Department Head will contact the media representative and redirect them to the Communications Team at South Central Strategic Health Authority on 01635 275657, 01635 275613 or 01635 275614.

7. The Business Manager/Department Head will keep the SCSHA, the Dean or appropriate lead and the Director fully briefed until the issue is closed.

b.) Media enquiries about situations of which NESC has prior knowledge

There are occasions when NESC will have prior knowledge of a situation with potential media interest. This could arise from a variety of situations such as a doctor being suspended from duty, the death of a doctor, a disciplinary or professional hearing or situations which may bring the clinical professions into disrepute.

The Business Manager/Department Head will ensure the Dean, appropriate lead and the Director are aware of the situation and potential for media attention. NESC will brief the SCSHA in advance. This will take the form of:

- A clear outline of the background to the situation and how it arose
• A brief summary of the current situation
• A projection of what is likely to happen next
• A short, clear statement from the appropriate part of NESC which acknowledges the current situation without giving unnecessary details. (This statement should not provide any personal details about the people involved, nor express an opinion as to what the likely cause of, or outcome of events may be.) This statement may be used by the SCSHA as a part of, or its entire response to the media enquiry.

Once a media enquiry has been received the Business Manager/Department Head will inform the Dean, appropriate lead and the Director and keep them briefed as the situation develops. NESC, the Deaneries and departments will not issue statements or provide briefings to the media. Any statement provided by NESC, the Deaneries or departments, will be issued through, and with the agreement of SCSHA. Once the SCSHA has been appropriately briefed, the Business Manager/Department Head will update this information regularly until the entire issue has been closed down.

c.) Out of hours media enquiries

A proposed way forward regarding out of hours media enquiries:
The NESC switchboard/s will contain a message along the lines of: - “If you are a representative of the media with an enquiry please call back in normal office hours ie 9am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday.”

Out of hours, if senior NESC staff become aware of any situation, or potential situation, which might cause media attention, they will contact South Central Strategic Health Authority on 08700 55 55 00. You should then quote: SCSHA 1. This will access, in the first instance, the Duty Communications Officer who will provide suitable advice or refer your call to the on-call Director. NESC staff should not provide this contact number to the media.

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