

No one can predict when a crisis may strike, whether it's a local incident or a global pandemic. We can, however, control the way we handle its impact on our staff and brand reputation. While health and care providers are doing a fantastic job to save lives and help the vulnerable, it is important that they have a public relations (PR) Crisis Plan in place during these unprecedented times.

If something goes wrong and an organisation or individual finds themselves in the spotlight of public attention, it's much easier to reduce distress and reputation damage if everyone knows what to do next. Most importantly, a comprehensive plan will allow you to manage the impacts of crisis efficiently and effectively, without diverting your valuable time from providing excellent care.

### There are three stages of a PR crisis:



Part I of this factsheet will cover what you should do **BEFORE** a crisis.

### Plan, review your continuity plan and consider the worst-case scenario

With just the core of a PR crisis plan in place, you and your team will save time, confusion, and stress. When time is of the essence, you cannot afford to waste time trying to find the Registered or Senior Manager's mobile number or being unable to post on social media because the IT lead is on holiday and no one knows the credentials.

You will need to establish a social media section in your PR crisis plan. In the event of a PR crisis, you must be sensitive to the situation. Ask yourself, are those social posts appropriate? Have you cleared your social calendar and restricted your messages to address the crisis only? Always deliver your responses in a humanised way and do not get angry and defensive as it will not help the situation when people may be scared and feeling vulnerable.



### Action 1: Create a crisis response team

A diverse team will give you different perspectives. Ensure your team includes people with different backgrounds and skills, such as different races, genders, ages, views, politics. Ensure you have a mix of clinical and non clinical staff involved as a diverse group can make sure that messages will not be misinterpreted and end up adding fuel to the crisis fire. Always remember what works for some may offend or baffle others. It's crucial that you run all your crisis response messages past everyone.

The team need to:

List in order of priority, who should be notified if a crisis strikes. This will depend on the level of crisis severity and the size of your team.

Ideally, your Registered or Senior manager should lead your crisis team, along with any PR or legal staff you have access to. Depending on the nature of the crisis, you will need people with knowledge related to the current crisis.

Establish a chain of command and an approval process – senior manager, management team, legal, HR, etc.

Before a crisis strikes, nominate and train your media spokesperson who may be your Registered Manager, who will speak on behalf of your company. Reacting quickly and speaking with one voice only is critical, as multiple voices will confuse and possibly exacerbate the situation.

Who is responsible for communication? Your management team must be involved – such as social media messages, press releases, blog posts. Depending on the type of crisis, all communications should be passed by your Registered or Senior manager and any legal team or HR representative.

Your spokespeople must have:

Skills that fit. Good spelling is a necessity. How about speaking in front of the camera? Using a representative that is camera shy is not a good idea.

Level of authority. The nature of the crisis will dictate the necessary level of authority. National disaster, loss of life - demands your Registered Senior manager at the helm.

Appropriate training. It is about being prepared and ready to respond instead of a marketing opportunity. Proper training can be crucial to protecting your reputation. Ensure your spokespeople are entirely up to speed.

### Step 2: Create your PR crisis management plan

When a crisis hits, you will be flooded with requests for information. These will come from every direction, including your teams, patients or clients and commissioners. To show that you are in control of the situation, you must be ready. This is when your crisis communication plan will come into its own. It should contain:

A checklist of what needs to be done - it is easy to miss steps when everyone is running around juggling multiple tasks

Contact details of key people – these must be in the business continuity plan annex

Who is on your side? Experts, friendly journalists, influencers, lawyers.

Draft messages - templates for press releases, social media posts, interview Q&As, etc.

#### An example of a checklist:

- Find out the facts
- Plan the updates and make sure they are ongoing
- An up-to-date staff list
- Required social media log on details
- Find out where is your Business Continuity Plan
- Make contact with the Local Authority, Commissioners and other stakeholders

### Step 3: Create holding statement templates

You cannot write messages to deal with a crisis before it strikes. But, holding statements can be created to cover some predicted crises. You should have a holding statement template which;

Is adaptable to fit unpredicted crises

Can be filled with details of the incident before publication

Does not include details that are unconfirmed or uncertain

Does not express any kind of speculation

#### An example of statement on the outbreak of Covid19:

"We are aware that guidance has been issued around Coronavirus and we will be making a formal statement including how we will carry out risk assessments for patients/clients and our team in the next 24 hours."

### Action 4: Be alert at all times

Make sure you are always listening to catch those early warning signs of possible PR issues. Make a list of key things to monitor - your brand, trending topics, key personnel, influencers, hashtags, products, competitors, industry news.

You must monitor what is being said about you and the Health and Social care industry so you can identify - catch a negative trend - and respond. This can include but not limited to:

Social media

The press

Review sites

Blog posts

Employees

Customers

Competitors



### How much of the above have you done?

In Summary, you should have:

A PR crisis plan that saves you and your team time, confusion, and stress when you cannot afford to waste time

A diverse PR crisis response team to run your crisis response messages past them

A checklist of what needs to be done, including contact details of key people and draft messages

An identified and agreed appropriate spokesperson that has the right level of authority and crisis training

Policies or systems in place to stay alert to early warning signs of possible PR issues, such as industry and competitor news.