

MEDIA ACTIVITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS POLICY®

DOCUMENT SUMMARY/KEY POINTS

- This policy is intended to:
 - Set guidelines for dealing with the media.
 - Protect the privacy of patient's families and staff.
 - Maintain courtesy and respect for all concerned.
 - Maximise the positive impact of Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN, the Network) and its hospitals and facilities, The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW), Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick (SCH), the Newborn and Paediatric Emergency Transport Service (NETS), Bear Cottage, Children's Court Clinic and Kids Research.
 - Ensure appropriate and consistent management of media enquiries, visits and requests.
 - Correct briefing of interviewees including staff, patients and families.
 - All media liaison including interviews and photography are undertaken with correct approval.

CHANGE SUMMARY

- Due for mandatory review – minor changes made
- Deleted 2.2.7 Medical research and scientific news as this is covered under 3.1.2
- Added 3.1.5 to cover promotional requests from third party organisations
- Added volunteers to the scope of policy audience
- Added reference to Code of Conduct

READ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

- All staff are to read and acknowledge they understand the contents of this document.

Approved by:	SCHN Policy, Procedure and Guideline Committee	
Date Effective:	1 st March 2024	Review Period: 3 years
Team Leader:	Public Relations Officer	Area/Dept: Public Relations Department

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1 Background

The Network's relationship with members of the media plays an important role in maintaining our reputation as leaders in paediatric health locally, nationally and internationally. Media and Communications liaisons assist to;

- Develop our brands by raising our profile
- Communicate key health messages by sharing positive patient stories, research and initiatives, educating the community and sharing successes
- Portray the Network, its hospitals, facilities and staff in a positive light, building morale and attracting new staff
- Profile our work and events to help raise funds
- Manage any contentious issues that may negatively reflect on the Network, its hospitals, facilities, staff, patients or families.

Communicating with the media may involve direct contact with a journalist or indirect contact, for example, speaking at a conference or seminar.

The release of information about the Network, its hospitals, its facilities, staff, patients or families must be coordinated through the Directorate of Communications and Engagement (DCE) located at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick (SCH) and The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW). Media are not permitted on site to interview, film, photograph or record audio of staff, patients or their families without the approval and supervision of a Communications and Engagement staff member or authorised representative.

In the context of this policy, the term 'staff' is inclusive of volunteers at the Network's entities.

2 Policy

2.1 Directorate of Communications and Engagement

All Health Services have a duty to provide meaningful, accurate and helpful advice to the community about important public health issues. Print, radio and television media are important vehicles to help distribute such information.

Media and Communications Officers will manage all media enquiries and requests, on behalf of the Network. They will provide advice to staff, patients and families on how best to approach a media request and ensure the relevant approvals are sought via the Executive, NSW Ministry of Health and the NSW Minister for Health's office, where appropriate.

Media and Communications Officers are available during normal business hours; Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.00pm. A on-call Media and Communications Officer is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for urgent media enquiries. The on-call Media and Communications Officer can be contacted at any time via either hospital's switchboard:

Contact information:

In hours	After Hours (<i>request Media and Communications Officer on call</i>)
Email: schn-publicrelations@health.nsw.gov.au	The Children's Hospital at Westmead Phone 9845 3364 or via switch 9845 0000

Phone: 9845 3364

Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick
Phone 9382 1983 or via switch 9382 1111

2.2 Media contact/opportunities

2.2.1 Public comment

Public comment includes public speaking engagements, comments in the media, views expressed in *Letters to the Editor*, online (such as blogs) or in publications. This includes any public correspondence, written or verbal, where a staff member is representing SCHN, CHW, SCH, Bear Cottage, NETS, Children's Court Clinic or Kids Research.

All contact with the media, whether direct or indirect, must be notified to DCE in the first instance. Staff must seek approval from the DCE prior to any interaction with the media (either verbal or written). If a staff member is contacted directly by a media representative, they must notify the DCE prior to making comment or agreeing to the media request.

Although staff members have the right as private citizens to express personal views through public comment, they must not appear to make statements on behalf of either hospital, the Network, or other Network/NSW Health entities.

All SCHN staff are required to comply with the NSW Health Code of Conduct. This code stipulates staff must act professionally and ethically, and more specifically, avoid conduct that could bring NSW Health or any of its staff, patients or clients into disrepute ([4.3.12](#)). Any public comment made on behalf of either hospital, the Network, or other Network/NSW Health entities, including on social media, without approval is considered a breach of the Code of Conduct.

2.2.2 Expert opinion on health matters

Health care professionals have a responsibility to ensure that the public are properly informed on health matters within their area of expertise. When a request is made by the media for expert medical knowledge, clinicians should assist in providing information where appropriate, via the Media and Communications Officer. When acting as an official spokesperson, the representative should be prepared to be named in all interviews or media requests for information.

2.2.3 Condition reports

DCE may be contacted by the media requesting the medical status of a patient. It is common to receive this type of request when a patient has been injured in an accident or other newsworthy event such as a fire, helicopter retrieval, drowning etc.

All condition report requests should be immediately directed to DCE, or if after hours, the Media and Communications Officer on call.

DCE is unable to release any information regarding a patient's condition, including de-identified condition updates, without first obtaining written or verbal consent from the patient's parent or guardian. This includes any personal identifying details such as name, age, and medical information.

General classification of a patient's condition is as follows:

- **Satisfactory** – the patient requires very little further medical treatment.

- **Stable** - the patient's condition is stable and controlled.
- **Serious but stable** - the patient's condition necessitates considerable medical and nursing support but is stable and controlled.
- **Serious** – the patient's condition necessitates considerable medical and nursing support.
- **Critical** – the patient requires intensive treatment and/or survival is doubtful.

2.2.4 Condition reports – FACs patients and NSW Police matters

No information regarding patients in the care of the Department of Family and Community Services (FACs) should be released without the express permission from the relevant FACs representative. This can be obtained via the doctor in charge, hospital social worker or Child Protection Unit representative.

2.2.5 Condition reports – NSW Police matters

Careful consideration must be given prior to releasing any information on patients whose injuries may be under police investigation. The NSW Police Media Unit should be consulted prior to issuing information to media, to ensure that Network communication does not negatively impact on an active police investigation.

2.2.6 Condition reports – Deceased patients

SCHN cannot confirm that a patient is deceased. All condition report requests on patients who have died while in hospital should be referred to the NSW Police Media Unit. Where possible, journalists should only be referred to the NSW Police Media Unit once the bereaved family have been given the opportunity to notify their extended family and friends.

2.2.7 Official visitors

Official visitors include public officials, celebrities, sponsors and supporters. All official visitors must be notified to DCE. It is the responsibility of DCE to ensure the Chief Executive is formally notified if appropriate, that the visit is suitable to the hospital environment, that appropriate timetabling is maintained, any internal briefs are drafted and that any media accompanying the visit is managed according to policy.

2.2.8 'Off the record' comments

Staff should not make any 'off-the-record' comments to media as this technique is not usually successful. If staff are not prepared to be quoted, they should not make a statement. Any requests for 'off the record' comments should be directed to DCE.

2.2.9 Declining interviews or media requests

Staff, patients and families have a choice as to whether they participate in any media interview or request. DCE are available to provide advice on how best to approach a media interview and will decline interviews and media requests on behalf of staff, patients and families, where appropriate. Staff approached directly for an interview or media request should immediately redirect this to DCE.

2.3 Media access to the hospital

Media are not permitted on hospital premises unless accompanied by a member of DCE or a nominated representative. Media should be escorted off the premises at the conclusion of the interview.

If a film crew, journalist or photographer arrives at a ward or department without prior approval and without a DCE representative, DCE must be immediately notified. If after hours, both the Media and Communications Officer and site security should be contacted to arrange for media to be escorted off hospital grounds. The on-call Media and Communications Officer can be contacted via the switchboard.

3 Procedure for media opportunities and official visits

3.1.1 Patient involvement in media

Prior to any patient being approached to participate in media activity, the patient's treating clinician must be contacted to ensure it is appropriate for their patient be included in media activity.

Once approved, the patient's parent or guardian must be consulted by a CDCE representative who will outline full details of the media opportunity including type of media, date and time of visit, story angle and requirements of the patient/family. Written or verbal consent (SCHN Consent Form) must be obtained prior to a patient participating in a media opportunity. Written consent should be obtained, where possible.

The Nursing Unit Manager must be notified and give permission for any media activity to take place on the ward. They must also grant permission for the patient to be taken off the ward for media related purposes.

The DCE representative must always remain with the patient during an interview or photo opportunity. Parents, clinical staff or the DCE representative have the right to terminate an interview or photo shoot at any time, should they feel it is in the best interests of the patient or Network.

3.1.2 Staff involvement in media

All requests for interviews with staff or official comment on behalf of the Network must come through DCE. If the subject matter is deemed sensitive or contentious, a DCE representative will notify the executive team and where appropriate, the Chief Executive will be informed prior to a staff member being interviewed. In some cases, a statement will be provided on behalf of the Network in place of an interview.

It is the responsibility of DCE to obtain all pertinent information from the journalist or media outlet so a staff member can be appropriately briefed, prior to an interview taking place. This includes obtaining information on the type of media involved, story angle and any relevant background information that will make it possible for a staff member to make an informed comment on the issue. The DCE representative will liaise with staff and media to arrange a mutually convenient time for media activity to occur.

3.1.3 Media for visits

When media is present as part of a celebrity, donor or official visit, the Nursing Unit Manager of each participating ward must be consulted to ensure it is appropriate for media to visit their ward. A DCE representative must outline the purpose of media to a patient's parent or guardian, prior to media activity taking place and obtain consent for media interviews, filming or photography.

3.1.4 Internal promotional opportunities

Patients and families can be approached to be involved with promotional opportunities for specific departments, separate to broader hospital promotion. This may include purposes such as education, training and advocacy. In these instances, the department must contact DCE to inform them of the activity and written consent must be obtained from the family involved.

In instances where this activity is internal and only for use by the department, a delegate staff member can be identified by DCE to obtain consent. It is then the responsibility of the delegate staff member and the department to file these consent forms appropriately.

3.1.5 Promotional opportunities for third parties

The Network works with a number of third parties, including charity partner, Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation. Staff, families and patients may be approached to be involved in a promotional opportunity to support third party activities, including for the purposes of fundraising.

All requests for third party promotional support must be directed through DCE. It is the responsibility of DCE to obtain all pertinent information and liaise with the relevant staff member, patient or family to arrange a mutually convenient time for promotional activity to occur.

Staff must not give out personal details, including name, contact details, medical condition, of patients to any third party organisation. These details should only be supplied by DCE, after express consent has been obtained from the patient/family.

4 Additional resources

Further information is available here:

- **NSW Health Code of Conduct:**
https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/Pages/doc.aspx?dn=PD2015_049
- **Social Media Policy:**
<https://webapps.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/epolicy/policy/6218>
- **Photography, Film and Video Recording for Media, Promotional, Fundraising or Social Events Policy:**
<https://resources.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/policies/2016-9027.pdf>

- SCHN Media Consent Forms:
 - **Patient Consent form:**
http://chw.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/o/forms/public_relations/media_consent_-_patient.pdf
 - **Staff/Volunteer Consent form:**
http://chw.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/o/forms/public_relations/media_consent_-_staff_and_volunteers.pdf
- **Withdrawal of Consent form:**
http://chw.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/o/forms/public_relations/media_consent_-_withdrawal_of_consent.pdf

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