

HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING
15 March 2007

**Response to Health Scrutiny Review of
Communications in the Local Health Service**

Following a report reviewing communications in the local health service, presented to the Health Scrutiny Committee at the end of 2005, significant action has been taken by Hereford County Hospital in-line with the report's findings and recommendations.

A) Ensure the message gets to everyone

Trust Team Brief

Since the autumn of 2005, emphasis has been placed on ensuring that weekly Team Briefs are more interesting and informative for all levels of staff. A monthly '*Formal Team Brief*' has been introduced where Executive Directors feedback discussions and decisions taken at Board meetings to staff. An open question and answer session follows, where staff at all levels are free to question the Board on any matters.

A register has been introduced to allow attendance at team briefing sessions to be monitored. In addressing concerns over disseminating information to those unable to attend, a cascade process has been established following Formal Team Brief. Those in attendance are requested to formally record individuals briefed in their departments. The aim is to encourage staff to feedback the contents of Team Brief to their teams on a regular basis.

There is a specific Team Brief section on the Trust Intranet site which is open to all staff to access. Availability is promoted throughout the hospital and has proved popular, particularly for staff that cannot attend any particular team brief.

The Directors attend all monthly formal team briefs and facilitate the weekly team briefs. This ensures that feedback to questions given is as accurate and informative as possible. Matrons also attend the sessions and are charged with feeding key information back to their nursing staff who may be unable to attend due to ward commitments.

The Hospital Council

This has been established to provide an open forum where staff can discuss their views / concerns surrounding particular issues. The Council, chaired by a member of staff, meets on a quarterly basis and there is at least one Director present at each meeting. These meetings are held on a Friday lunchtime which allows the majority of staff to attend, including nursing staff, as it falls just before the shift change. Global emails are issued and posters put up around the Trust informing staff of the meeting dates / times and requesting topics for discussion be forwarded to the Council co-ordinator to add to the agenda. Every effort is made to ensure that all requests are catered for and the Council have been responsible for a number of changes / improvements at the Trust.

Management Walkabouts

As highlighted by the Health Scrutiny's report, management walkabouts continue to provide a "good opportunity for genuine two-way communication to take place...". There have been a number of changes in senior management in the Trust and Directors are continuing to ensure they maintain a high visibility throughout the Hospital. As part of the Board Development Programme, attention will also be paid to raising the profile of Non Executive Directors throughout the organisation.

B) Communication needs to be structured

In terms of overarching structured communications across the health community, the PCT is aiming to strengthen its commissioning responsibilities in collaboration with Herefordshire Council under a Public Service Trust model. How the Trust interacts with this new body and how communications can be better structured and formalized will need to be considered in the light of these changes.

The Trust has strengthened relationships with GPs with the aim of improving the links between primary and secondary care and securing GPs commitment to the Hospital. The Trust have established a senior Clinical Team and regularly attend GP Locality meetings throughout Herefordshire to discuss hospital developments and to identify areas for improved working and opportunities for collaboration in provision of services. A GP action plan has been developed which is being overseen by the Trust's Chief Executive.

The Trust works in collaboration with the PCT's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), and a joint approach is taken to addressing issues / concerns which cover both hospital and PCT services.

C) More emphasis on communication as part of staff training

Communication is being addressed at all levels within the Trust, with a Dignity and Respect Policy having been introduced emphasising the importance of effective communication and 'customer care'. A training programme '*Effective Communication with Patients and the Public*', has also been developed for all front line staff, using real examples from complaints and PALS contacts.

D) Make communication the responsibility of all

The significant improvements in communication detailed above have emphasized the important role that individuals play in ensuring that information is effectively disseminated within their teams / departments. The new intranet and internet sites and the increased emphasis on team / group meetings and information flow throughout the Trust underpin this improvement. With the intended launch of a new Communications Policy, at the beginning of 2007/2008, the importance of effective communication will be highlighted throughout the Trust and the onus placed on communication being the responsibility of all.

The Head of Corporate Affairs has a pivotal role in developing public relations seeking out opportunities wherever possible to promote the positive work being done by the Trust. This also incorporates building on relationships with local organizations, press and other forms of media to raise the profile of the Trust and send positive messages out into the community.

E) Consider the "external customer"

As part of the Trust's public consultation on becoming a Foundation Trust, key stakeholders / external customers were identified and ways of effectively communicating and engaging with them determined. These external customers include: Herefordshire PCT; Herefordshire Council; the Health Scrutiny Committee; the PPI forum; NHS Alliance; GPs; Powys LHB; MPs.

The Trust is keen to develop relationships with the PPI Forum who are involved in several committees including the Governance and Risk Committee and the Involving Patients and the Public Committee. The Involvement Committee also has representatives from the consumer group which is the internal patient group led by PALS so that views can be shared. The visiting protocol has been updated and the forum are undertaking monitoring visits. PALS is the link for the forum into the hospital and they are keen to assist the forum in any way.

The Trust has established stronger links with GPs in their important role as 'external customers' as detailed previously.

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As part of the Trust's ambition to become a Foundation Trust, the Hospital is building a membership from local people who are interested in contributing to future plans for the Hospital. The aim is for the Trust to generate at least 2000 members before it achieves FT status.

The Trust has established a new internet site www.herefordhospital.nhs.uk and is developing information about all services provided.

John Campbell, FT Programme Director
6 March 2007