

Humana
White Paper
0309

Building stakeholder engagement through improved communications



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Starting a conversation

Talking. Listening. Sharing ideas. Learning. Improving. In the drive towards world class commissioning, effectively communicating change that will translate into action is essential.

As PCTs work hard to address the healthcare needs of their populations and prioritise strategic aims and objectives, they must involve stakeholders at all levels, and in all areas, if they wish to reach their intended goals within the required timeframe.

Engaging with an audience of stakeholders can be a difficult process. The commercial sector has been working with similar challenges for years, and it is to their experience and knowledge we can turn to help advance progress.

This White Paper is one of a series that will discuss the critical importance of engaging stakeholders to help deliver your strategic objectives; it includes valuable insight into commercial best practices on communication that could equally apply to anyone involved in running an efficient healthcare system.

An opportunity to lead the way

Historically, communications have been viewed as physical deliverables such as newsletters or cascade documents – seen as ‘soft’ projects, or ‘nice to have’ – but not critical. Today, initiating productive dialogue with stakeholders at every touchpoint has never been more important. Effective communications are both the foundation and the key

to delivering the answers and results necessary to meet world class commissioning standards.

There is an increasing focus on patient and public engagement, but this is only one area where communication needs to be reappraised. A priority is to engage stakeholders in the development of policy; that means dealing with diverse groups spanning NHS staff, healthcare providers, local health authorities, clinicians, social services and so forth, to best understand how, where and when they need their information.

Matching stakeholder requirements to those of the PCT, to deliver the right information at the most optimum time, is the ideal scenario. This valuable exchange would increase efficiency, and ultimately help both parties inform, learn and influence each other.

Making the connection

As PCTs outline their future goals, their stakeholders require an unequivocal understanding of what those goals are – and the role they will need to play – in order to be able to fulfil them. Any disconnection between commissioners and providers will mean loss of impetus and direction from bottom to top. Objectives left to casually filter all the way down an organisation will rarely meet their target.

To illustrate this point we can draw on our own practical experience of working with stakeholders, and share the following observation: we spoke to an entire sector of care providers, all highly aware of their objectives ... but the majority had only the vaguest impression of how meeting their targets would fit into the broader aims and long-term strategy of their local PCT.

Unprompted confusion such as this is not rare. In its role as both commissioner and provider of services, a PCT has to address engagement programmes at every level in order to work effectively, whilst clearly defining strategic objectives that all stakeholders can understand and commit to.

Understanding who you are

The key to effective communications is first understanding who you are as an organisation, and which values you wish to own. Listening and learning from stakeholder responses is one of the first steps a PCT can take to create a strong and credible brand, yet this itself can cause an unwelcome, but all too common, revelation: the

Does your PCT engage with its stakeholders? Ask yourself the following:

- Do stakeholders agree that PCT communications are valuable and relevant?
- Do they regard the PCT as a partner who enables them to do their job?
- Are they aware of PCT strategic projects? Specifically, do they:
 - have a greater level of involvement in key strategic initiatives?
 - submit an increased number of relevant business cases?
 - understand their influence on PCT targets?
- Can they identify your PCT's brand values through their experiences across all PCT touchpoints?
- Do they understand just how much their role will change over the next 5 years?
- Can you measure PCT priorities against their performance, evaluating a shift in both attitudes and behaviours over time?

PCT thinks it stands for a certain set of values – but the majority of its workers, users and stakeholders do not share the same view.

Put concisely, when a PCT states its values, it does not mean it is necessarily so.

There are a significant number of instances where we have learned this through practical application. A PCT, asked to describe its intrinsic values and how it believes it is perceived, confidently states 'open', 'respectful', 'listening', 'straightforward' and 'honest'.

But responses elicited from stakeholders and service users reveal 'inefficient', 'disorganised', 'evasive', 'stressed' and 'very bureaucratic'.

World class communications

Every large organisation has its own culture and code, and it can be easy to become detached from the outside world, especially when focusing inwardly on managing enormous change. But at this time of transformation, an emphasis on good communication skills has never been more relevant.

Effective communication programmes are central to world class commissioning competencies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and arguably should be part of all eleven.

As PCTs gear up for the inevitable changes, it is the success (or failure) of their external and internal communications that will guide and inform their future strategies.

Creating the right results

Two-way communication is the basis of any strong and productive relationship. When a PCT shares results and data, and involves its stakeholders with work in progress, the decision-making process is made more robust and end results are undoubtedly improved.

Key points to achieve this would be:

- Awareness – make sure stakeholders know the PCT's priorities
- Engagement – valuable contributions are missed if the right people are not involved early enough; engagement managed in a focused and informed manner will fill in more of the expertise gaps
- Action – PCTs have a reputation for good strategic thinking, backed by very little practical action.

Feedback from a 2008 forum regarding PCT communications between acute providers, GPs, political bodies, media and the public

“We could run with more positive stories if they provided more than a 500-word press release.”

“PCT mergers have meant I have lost contact and don't know who to deal with.”

“Often we tell them what's going on within their own organisation.”

“We have access to information that the PCT would find really interesting – but I can't find anyone to take advantage of it.”

Even when results are achieved, reporting back positive progress is minimal. Communications that involve stakeholders will help demonstrate that action is taking place, and prove that their issues have been heard and acted upon

- Unified effort and working in partnership – sharing changes, ideas and initiatives will result in joined-up thinking and lead to patient-centric health solutions

There is no 'one-size fits all'

Communicating successfully to one sector is only part of the challenge. PCTs will also require the ability to deliver the same message with a number of very different voices – as health champions to public and patients, as first-class budget-conscious commissioners within their own organisation, and as local leaders of the NHS to their own staff. Engaging PCT staff is pivotal when redeveloping healthcare services; changes need to be presented effectively and positively to ensure active involvement and personal advocacy from staff at all levels.

PCTs must also consider the separation of commissioning and provision of services, which creates its own set of problems. Both organisations will need clear identities and specific aims to suit their different purposes in order to communicate successfully. Added to this is the possibility of negative PR fallout; without expert handling, the majority of the positive and exciting 'feelgood' stories will remain with the service providers, such as midwives and nurses.

Commissioners without an effective communication strategy to promote and explain their decisions could be left isolated, reinforcing the prejudice of faceless bean counters who deny treatment.

World class commissioners are central to a self-improving NHS. They will operate as learning organisations, seeking and sharing knowledge and skills

DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH GUIDE TO
WORLD CLASS
COMMISSIONING

What works well?

Sunita is a General Practitioner within a medium to large surgery, and her specialist topic is diabetes. She is the partner within the practice who keeps up to speed on developments in treatment, and shares this knowledge with her colleagues. The colleagues also go to her if they have questions.

An astute PCT will know about this, and see an opportunity to capture Sunita's area of interest, so she can be kept proactively informed and managed.

No need for costly mail-outs or labour-intensive printed documents; a simple email notification with a link to the appropriate part of a website will keep Sunita involved, and the service improved.

Service providers will face their own very different challenges, including communicating with a geographically diverse workforce. And, as time goes on, they will need to be able to demonstrate a clear point of difference amongst growing competition, or risk being seen as 'just another provider'. Ultimately, service providers need to become experts at communicating that they are the best-suited provider – with commissioners as their critical audience.

A national health service that acts local – and thinks local

Every national initiative has to start at a local level. Similarly, many of the changes needed to attain world class commissioning status will have to come from ground level. A PCT that invites comment and discussion from its stakeholders will immediately make debate more meaningful: asking stakeholders to contribute to agendas in advance of meetings demonstrates you are

interested in their issues, just as much as you expect them to be interested in yours.

Making it easy for a stakeholder to contribute is an issue in itself; with so many recent changes and mergers, a recurring theme from stakeholders with valid points to make and crucial feedback to share is finding the right person at the PCT to talk to. This frustrating experience and unclear direction creates an atmosphere of lost momentum – and eventually a danger of lost interest in the PCT's goals.

Conversely, an effective engagement programme pays off in future goodwill and increased positivity from associated stakeholders, and a more enthusiastic willingness to embrace change.

Time is money

If there is one major issue PCTs need to address when communicating, it is the primary care providers' attitude to best use of time. Time to talk. Time to read a 500-page document. Time to attend a PCT strategy meeting.

As with all professionals, time equals money. Any meeting, printed paper, email or newsletter that takes time to read and absorb is always going to be weighed against the responsibilities of budget and daily commitments.

Generally, newsletters may be read amongst senior managers and clinicians, and the web could be accessed to examine board papers. For a time-poor GP, a short to-the-point email, focused on clinical changes for their particular speciality, is more likely to be read, understood and acted upon. Likewise a website which clearly highlights changes to practice is of clear and immediate value, as the reader has no need to wade through pages of dense information to see what they are expected to do.

Example of a missed opportunity: The case for fast-track PBC



There was a great opportunity to create a 'fast track' process for PBC business cases that had no clinical risk, but could offer a financial saving for GP surgeries, or a PBC scheme that had a patient benefit, but was budget-neutral.



Current PCT procedures and paperwork do not make innovative ideas easy to put into practice. Unless the appropriate stakeholders are involved earlier in the thinking/planning process, given the chance to operate more flexibly and the power to make appropriate decisions, frustration will build and opportunities to improve our health service will continue to be lost.

Delivering information in the best-suited format is crucial to communication success, and an effective PCT should consider and log personal preference (e.g. mailed out newsletter versus email newsletter) for all its stakeholders.

Think differently

Engaging with GPs – or any stakeholder group – requires thought and imagination. Getting stakeholders to collaborate together, whether GPs, commissioners, care providers, social care or PCT staff, is where engagement becomes worth its weight in gold.

Understanding what motivates people to act (or not) is vital. Step into a GP's shoes for a moment and consider the daily responsibilities of running a busy surgery; now imagine your PCT has set a meeting to discuss changes to clinical practice – during surgery hours. You have to weigh up:

- The cost of a locum
- The effect on patient continuity
- The belief (or not) that your contribution will be heard and will influence the eventual outcome
- The belief that you will be kept informed and will see results

Will you find time to attend the meeting? Can you afford to? Can you afford not to? Or will you attend – but in a cynically negative frame of mind?

Personal motivation will always affect the level of stakeholder engagement. If individual concerns are not taken into account, the PCT's higher strategic aims will unquestionably fall short.

To stay in our stakeholder's shoes a moment longer, consider the following:

1. You need to make money/stay within budget
2. You spend hundreds of hours creating paperwork at the PCT's request; if you receive any feedback at all, it is usually negative, never positive
3. At work you are time-poor – you haven't got time for jargon/wordiness
4. You are in a prime position to see all the 'missed' opportunities – but who will listen to you?

Getting the message across

When we consider targeting the right people in the right way, a strong parallel can be drawn from the commercial world.

Leading software manufacturers and office technology suppliers have long realised that in order to get SMEs to consider their products, they need to target the right decision-makers in the appropriate ways. Speaking to individuals in their own language is a proven method of achieving 'buy-in' for a service or product at all levels in an organisation.

A PCT which adopts a similar targeted 'all-level' approach for its communications to stakeholders will be on target for achieving world class commissioning.

However, as the recent King's Fund report* on healthcare communications has found, many PCTs have yet to reach these commercial levels of sophistication. The report finds that currently, providing information on its own "has little effect"; it further states that "programmes should not rely on just one approach ... as evidence shows the most effective interventions employ a variety of tactics." The report concludes that health service communications need to be more innovative, and

The biggest single problem in communications is the illusion that it has taken place.

GEORGE BERNARD
SHAW

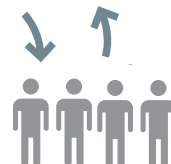
The pyramid of engagement



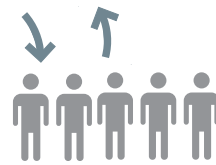
On Tuesday morning the Chairman and Managing Director both receive a high-value top-level information direct mail pack. The benefits of product X seem immediately apparent; they both mention product X at their midweek catch-up meeting.



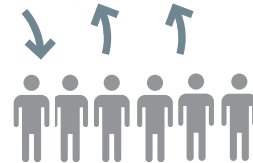
On Wednesday the Finance Director receives a straightforward DM pack focussed on the obvious financial advantages and increased efficiencies of product X; s/he brings it to the board's attention.



On Thursday the IT Director receives a DM pack detailing the leap forward in technologies and capabilities product X can now offer his/her department; s/he shares the findings with managers.



The following week, mid-level managers receive a scaled-down DM pack announcing how product X will make their jobs easier, with reference to their manager's awareness of the benefits.



By the end of this communication programme, chief influencers and staff at key levels understand the prime message and can reiterate the benefits of change amongst themselves. The idea of investing in product X achieves buy-in from top to bottom in the organisation.

*Source: BBC news report December 2008; see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7767603.stm>

that “social marketing techniques and data analysis tools like geo-demographics should be used to identify, target and communicate messages designed to motivate.”

The case for personalised engagement

This is a critical time to re-examine what 'sending a communication' means. A piece of printed paper is not necessarily a communication; if it is not read, or is misunderstood, communication cannot be said to have taken place. Likewise, better communication does not necessarily mean more communication.

Think laterally. And think on a personal level about each recipient and the role you wish him or her to take on. Some stakeholders will welcome personal contact – a letter, a phone call, or a face-to-face visit – some will prefer the immediacy of an email or a website link they can access in their own time.

It's worth noting here that your staff are your largest consumer insight team: they live in the local area, use local healthcare services, and are particularly attuned to the challenges confronting PCTs, particularly from a communications and engagement perspective. Harnessing that first-hand knowledge can help inform the production of relevant and appropriate staff communications, and engender internal support.

Reaching WCC standards

If a PCT is serious about attaining its strategic objectives and meeting world class commissioning standards, investing in building one-to-one relationships with stakeholders should be a major priority.

A PCT fuelled by all-level engagement will have direction and purpose, improve deployment of its budgets, promote healthcare innovation, foster effective working partnerships and operate a sound business model for a world class health system.

A PCT which can successfully engage stakeholders will:

- Lead the way for the NHS locally
- Work effectively with community partners
- Connect with public and patients
- Collaborate with clinicians
- Manage knowledge and assess needs
- Prioritise investment
- Stimulate the market
- Promote improvement and innovation
- Secure procurement skills
- Manage the local health system
- Make sound financial investments

The methods used to promote public health need to be more modern, using the most advanced techniques and technologies

DR ANNA DIXON,
DIRECTOR OF POLICY,
KING'S FUND

Humana Creative

Humana is a world leader in developing consumer-facing healthcare brands that engage behaviour at every level.

Humana Creative is our specialist full service creative communications agency, providing unique solutions to the many challenges involved in implementing communications, initiating public engagement and creating social marketing campaigns that deliver against world class commissioning competencies.

The expertise of **Humana Creative** encompasses the development, design, production and distribution of marketing and communications materials for both public and private sector clients, primarily in the healthcare and charities sectors. Recent clients include Simplyhealth, HSA, Spire Healthcare,

Breakthrough Breast Cancer and British Red Cross, along with a number of NHS PCTs and Acute and Mental Health Foundation Trusts.

What makes **Humana Creative** different is our people. Our team possesses proven senior marketing management experience in an extensive range of industries, successfully delivering both consumer-facing and business-to-business communications. Our highly-respected knowledge covers sectors in retail, FMCG, financial services, and telecommunications for global brands including Tesco, Vodafone, Harrods, American Express and Virgin. Our hard won skills in the commercial world bring a fresh perspective to healthcare communications, producing creative and innovative approaches that take engagement to a new level.

The rules of engagement

Who are you?

If you want people to listen to your organisation, you have to first find out who 'you' are. To discover how your organisation is outwardly perceived, many external conversations need to take place. Listening and learning from these responses helps you interpret what you should be saying, and how you should be saying it.

Who are you talking to?

Successful engagement means identifying and understanding your audience – its motivations, wants and needs – on an individual level.

An effective communications programme would cover all areas including public and patients, primary care, acute providers, local councils and MPs, clinicians, mental health providers, the private sector, the media and the voluntary sector. Within these groups the top 50 influencers have to be identified and segmented according to their attitude/need, and a bespoke communications plan developed.

What is your brand?

A brand is whatever a stakeholder/service user thinks or feels when your PCT is mentioned. It may not be what you think it is.

As illustrated in this White Paper, getting your PCT brand positioning right is fundamental to promoting services and achievements successfully, and spreading innovation.

What is your plan?

Establishing what needs to be communicated to each stakeholder group, and when, is essential. This means more than finding the best time of day to call, or choosing to email rather than write a personal letter; it means

focusing on getting the messaging right. Get this right and the required results will follow. Always plan ahead, and be ready to involve and react to stakeholder responses.

How will you achieve your aims?

Once you are clear who you are, who you are talking to, and what you should be saying, you need to identify where you are today. With this information you can map out how to arrive at your PCT's future aims.

To achieve change or create action within a targeted group requires insight into individual motivation. Whether addressing GPs or talking to a hard-to-reach social group, there are no 'average segments' – and no single communication would suit an entire audience. Personalised engagement is recommended when you need clear results.

Why start a conversation?

The emphasis today should be on 'conversations' rather than 'communications'; the way to world class commissioning will be paved by informed dialogue and engagement, not a one-way street of information.

Conversations are the best way to understand an individual's specific issues and concerns, with listening and learning from their responses being tantamount. The more you talk, the more you find out – making every conversation a valuable opportunity to learn more.

What's in it for me?

A successful communications programme can be envisaged as measurable results, improved patient experience, positive changes of stakeholder attitude and the ultimate achievement of PCT objectives.

What do I want people to do?

Every communication should be seen as a precious one-to-one opportunity, telling the recipient what you want or expect that person to do, think or feel. Keep it uncluttered. Keep it to the point. Keep it easy to understand. Any required response should be made as easy as possible.

Where are the results?

The only way to know if a communication has achieved its goal is to measure results. What worked and what didn't? Who understands the aim of a project and who doesn't? Without an exchange of information, you will not know. Measuring feedback is central to the success of communications, as every result will add to a growing stock of knowledge.

Are you keeping it fresh?

If a communication works well, there is a tendency to repeat it over and over again. However, very few activities are as successful upon repetition – there is always gradual erosion in response or effectiveness over time.

New ideas are vital, particularly for internal communications, which can quickly become 'samey' and easily neglected. Fresh ideas keep up the momentum and put local PCT objectives into action.

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We welcome your views. This White Paper can be reviewed on our website at humana.co.uk

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