

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.

## Plan, review your continuity plan & 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.

## There are three stages of a PR crisis:



Part 1 of this factsheet will cover what you should do **BEFORE** a crisis.



### Action 1:

## Create a crisis response team

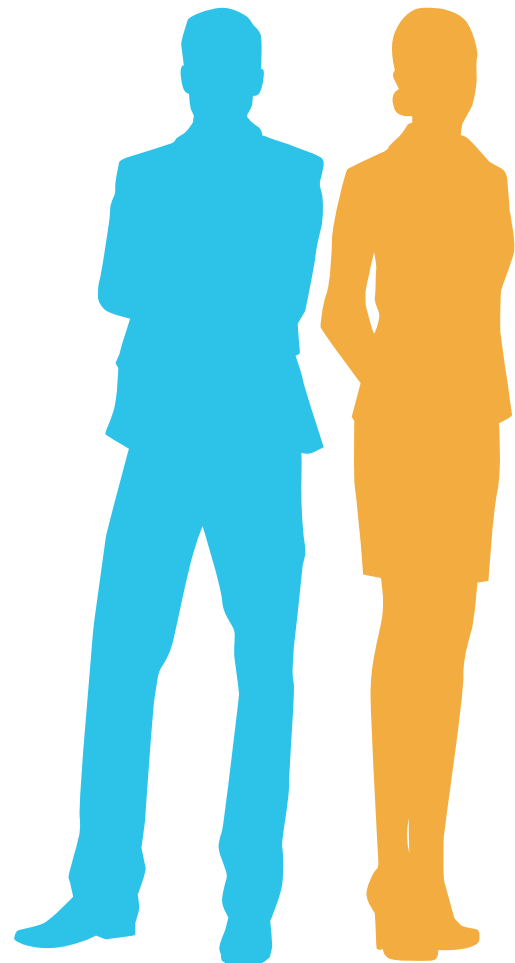
A diverse team will give you different perspectives. Ensure your team includes people with different backgrounds and skills, such as different races, genders, ages, views, politics. Ensure you have a mix of clinical and non clinical staff involved as a diverse group can make sure that messages will not 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.



## Action 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.



## Action 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

### Checklist preparation:

- 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

### 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:

- |                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social media | <input type="checkbox"/> Employees   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The press    | <input type="checkbox"/> Customers   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Review sites | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blog posts   |                                      |

### 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



In the last factsheet, we discussed the following:

**BEFORE** a Public Relations (PR) crisis, we should focus on:

- How and why we should have an extensive PR crisis plan in place
- The need for a diverse PR crisis response team
- What is a PR crisis checklist
- How to identify the appropriate spokesperson to represent your organisation

## There are three stages of a PR crisis:



Part II of this factsheet will cover what you should do **DURING** a crisis.

## During a crisis,

monitoring feedback will help you modify your response strategy.

Now that you have a comprehensive PR crisis plan in place, you need to pay attention to the delivery of the messages. There are still a lot of preparations before your chosen spokesperson speaks to the public to address the issue. What you say and how you say it are vital to how the public perceive your Health or Social care organisation. You should also be monitoring your feedback continuously. A monitoring system not only can identify negative trends but also catch positive patient or client usergenerated content or trending topics, which are crucial to creating your marketing and communication strategy and messaging.



## Action 1: Be Ready

### Identify influencers and brand ambassadors

- These people are not only useful for marketing campaigns and product launches, they are also great for influencing opinion during a crisis. The nature of the crisis will determine which individuals you should approach

### Get the facts before you speak

- It is no surprise that everyone is panicking and everyone wants action and answers. However, you must remain calm, follow your crisis procedure and do not speak until you have all the facts
- **Remember** - keep it factual, never speculate, always apologise

### Build your PR crisis messages

- With all the facts at your fingertips, you can now frame your response. Find the most transparent and genuine way to tackle the situation. Tell the public what happened, what you will do to solve it, what you will do in the future to avoid the same mistake. This is where the role of PR in crisis management becomes clear
- It is important to be open and honest. The sooner you communicate your apology, explanation and solution, the sooner people will stop speaking negatively of your brand or organisation

## Action 2 : What should you say?

### Accept responsibility and apologise

- Acknowledge any mistakes, say sorry, and take responsibility. Make it genuine, sensitive, human. Be honest and vulnerable and recognise any impact on your patients and clients
- Do not be scared to apologise. It is the right thing to do and will quickly change the dynamic of the situation

### Always tell the truth

- If you hide your mistakes, people will find out. Your brand reputation and value will be damaged. Be transparent, patients and clients want to work with providers that they trust and believe in
- If you deny a negative situation, dismiss the issue, blame others - you will make things so much worse when the truth comes out.
- Tell people what you are going to do to rectify the situation, and how you will avoid it happening again

### Provide clarity

- People must understand what is happened and what they need to do. Show that you acknowledge there is a crisis, explain your plan and what the next steps are

### Do not offer false promises

- Promises that you cannot keep will make the situation worse. Always respect the facts. There are people that could know more than you do, never underestimate the media, for instance

### Action 3:

#### How should you say it?

##### Empathise

- Ensuring your business survives is YOUR priority, but for those hit by the crisis, you should pay your attention to your patients or clients, the public, your employees, and stakeholders. Make sure you do the right thing

##### Do not flood with messages

- Three to four external messages are more than enough. Adapt them according to which channels you are going to post on. A good example is to have the main statement on your website and have other channels such as social media to support it

##### Channels of distribution

- This will depend on your usual positioning and overall communications. You should know which channels work best for your brand when talking to your audiences, such as blog, social media and press. Consider the different characteristics of each and make sure the core messages fit within character limits
- Try and keep the main release on your website as it gives you greater control, plus you are talking with your organisational voice
- Social media involves conversations. Be ready to talk and control your messages
- Press releases broadcast globally are readily picked-up by agencies, make sure the person whose contact details are on the press release is ready to respond



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

In Summary, you should have:

- Identified the appropriate influencers and brand ambassadors to represent your organisation
- Gather all the facts before you speak
- Admit your mistakes, show accountability and apologise
- Tell nothing but the truth to the public, with clarity
- Choose the right channels to deliver your messages

In the last two factsheets, we discussed the following:

**BEFORE** a Public Relations (PR) crisis, we should focus on:

- How and why we should have an extensive PR crisis plan in place
- The need for a diverse PR crisis response team
- A PR crisis checklist
- How to identify the appropriate spokesperson to represent your organisation

**DURING** a Public Relations (PR) crisis, we should focus on:

- Preparations required before addressing the issue to the public
- What should be included in the messages
- How should the message be delivered

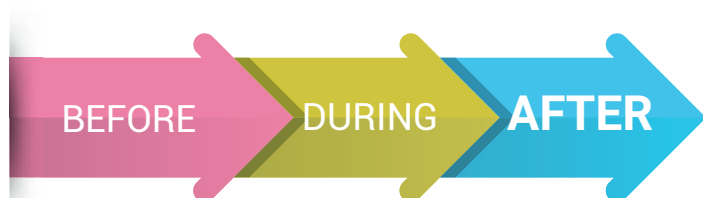
## Monitor, Update, Analyse and Learn

Your messages are out there. Some might be read and some might be commented on or ignored. Regardless, you must continue to monitor the situation and ask yourself - Is the PR crisis still a crisis? How is this impacting my teams, patients or clients?

Things can take some time to return to normal or it could happen all over again. Therefore, you must always be ready if asked to give more statements, interviews and comments on social channels.

Getting hit by a PR crisis is devastating. However, every cloud has a silver lining. You will learn from the experience, whether it is avoiding future crises, tackling issues, improvements to company operations, or crisis readiness.

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



*Part III of this factsheet will cover what you should do  
**AFTER** a crisis.*

## Action 1: Post-crisis review

- ☐ Reflect on the team's actions when managing the PR crisis
- ☐ Review areas to be improved in your crisis plan
- ☐ Mistakes that should be avoided where possible
- ☐ Things that can be done differently
- ☐ Lessons learnt from this process





## Overall Summary (From part I to part III)

A comprehensive plan is vital in managing the crisis efficiently and effectively, minimising the reputational damage to your provider organisation as well as saving you time to solve the problem when something goes wrong.

### I) Before the Crisis

- The importance of a diverse crisis response team, which can review your response before being publicised
- The responsibilities of the crisis response team, such as who to notify and in order of priority when a crisis happens, what to prepare before speaking to the public
- The information to be included in the Crisis Management Plan, such as a checklist of what needs to be done, contact details of Registered and senior managers, who can help to address the problem and draft message.
- The criteria of an adaptable holding statement template that will allow you to cover some predicted crises
- Areas to pay attention to catch the early warning signs of possible PR problems

### II) During the crisis

- Things to prepare before you speak to the public, including appropriate brand representatives and all the facts and information
- The importance of admitting your mistakes, be responsible and apologise
- How to choose the right channels to deliver your messages

### III) After the crisis

- The significance of review after the crisis
- Areas to be reviewed after the crisis

