



# Communications, the Media & Healthcare Associated Infections

*An Educational Framework for those involved  
in communications related to Healthcare  
Associated Infection incidents*

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## Introduction

Managing outbreaks of Healthcare Associated Infections (**HAI**) requires a planned and comprehensive response on many fronts. Today's information-rich society demands that communications, both within an organization and externally, are timely, accurate and appropriate if an incident is to be handled sensitively. Indeed, the way in which information is communicated can influence its management and outcome.

The HAI Action plan *Preventing Infections Acquired while Receiving Healthcare* (1) recognised that this is an important issue for NHS Scotland staff involved in dealing with Healthcare Associated Infections (**HAI**). It called for a review of training arrangements for those involved in dealing with the media and this was subsequently undertaken by Dr John Wrench's working Group in 2004 (2). The report called for the development of an educational resource to address induction and ongoing education of communication professionals and members of Incident Management Teams (see Appendix 1). As a result of this report, the HAI task force charged NHS Education for Scotland with the development of an Educational Framework to inform and support the development of comprehensive and coherent education provision across NHS Scotland.

This document describes that framework and outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours associated with those responsible for communications within, and issued by, Incident Management Teams. Incident Management Teams are collections of individuals that come together infrequently, under difficult circumstances and who require an understanding of their own role and that of others in the team. The challenge is therefore to provide education and training that is flexible, readily accessible, consistent, quality assured and that fits the needs of this diverse workforce.

In order to develop an open, transparent and consistent relationship with the media, NHS Scotland communications professionals and their incident management colleagues require education and training opportunities in order to meet and maintain expected standards. Although the principles of good communication and information management practice apply beyond this to many other aspects of healthcare, this Framework is focused specifically

on the handling, recording and reporting of information regarding Healthcare Associated Infection-related incidents.

## Healthcare Associated Infection

**HAI is defined as an infection originating in a healthcare facility, which was not present or incubating at the time of admission to the facility. HAI includes infections acquired in hospital but not apparent until after discharge, those contracted in healthcare facilities by staff and those picked up while receiving care outside of hospitals. Patients are at greater risk of encountering infections resistant to antibiotics and are increasingly vulnerable to HAI because they are, on average, older and their treatments often leave them more susceptible to contracting infections. HAI also creates a financial and professional burden on NHS Scotland.**

## How the Framework was developed

A working group of key stakeholders and external advisors was set up to inform the framework's development. Its membership included staff representing :

- NHS Scotland Communications professionals
- Health Protection Professionals
- Public Health Consultants
- NHS Education for Scotland
- Oil Industry sector

This Framework draws from a range of standards, guidelines and policies including:

*Guidance on training and support for those involved in media handling in NHS Scotland (2)*

*Managing incidents presenting actual or potential risks to the Public Health – Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of Incident Control Teams (3)*

*The Chartered Institute of Public Relations Code of Professional Conduct (4)*

## Who is the Framework for?

Although Communication Professionals have a lead role in the development and execution of communication strategies and protocols, all members of an Incident Management Team and, to some extent, many other members of NHS Staff, are required to understand the principles of communication, particularly in relation to the management of infection-related incidents.

The composition of the Incident Management Team will vary depending upon the nature of the outbreak and so this framework is applicable to the education and training for staff including, but not restricted to:

- NHS Scotland Communications staff
- Scottish Executive Communications Staff
- Key members of the Incident Management Team
- Public Health specialists
- Microbiologists and Infectious Disease consultants
- Senior management at Health Board level
- Those developing and delivering education – for example education institutions and Professional and representative associations providing education

## The Aims of the Framework

This framework aims to define a nationally agreed benchmark which will inform the education and training required by Incident Management Teams relating to communications and information management.

It provides a foundation for good practice and helps to ensure consistency of approach to this area education and training.

The framework does not provide educational materials, training programmes, structure or content of a course. Nor does it aim to replace existing high quality educational programmes where these exist. Rather, it complements and supports the range of internal and external education and training available to staff in NHS Scotland.

The Framework describes the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of those responsible for communications associated with an HAI incident. It is intended to be used by those responsible for developing, delivering or procuring education and training related to communication and working with the media in relation to HAI incidents. It may also be useful to those accessing education and training in this area.

Therefore the framework provides a benchmark, against which:

- existing education provision can be assessed in terms of relevance
- individual staff can determine their educational needs in relation to managing communications in the event of an HAI outbreak
- new educational programmes can be developed employers of non-NHS staff (contracted to give communications support during incidents) can assess their training programmes
- a training needs analysis may be designed

## The Framework

The Framework defines the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected of NHS Scotland staff and others involved in communication & information management during an HAI-related incident.

### ***Knowledge***

Employing good communication practice is dependent upon a sound knowledge of the environment in which staff are operating, the subject area they are working with and the general principles of communication.

Communications professionals need to have an appreciation of the principles of incident management – similarly, the Incident Management Team must have an awareness of the principles of good communication.

Staff involved in communications will have a good knowledge of:

- the structure and culture of NHS Scotland
- Healthcare Associated Infections (including nationally agreed definitions)
- relevant publications regarding the management of incidents
- how the various news media work
- the culture and technologies associated with information gathering, dissemination and archiving
- Information Governance issues - including Freedom of Information Act, the Data Protection Act & ethico-legal issues
- protocols for logging, creating incident reports, audit & analysis
- an appreciation of local conditions and structures that may affect the communications strategy
- the need for cultural and religious sensitivities
- the importance of reputation management
- the parameters of their own role within the Incident Management Team and the role of others in the team
- principles of risk management in relation to HAI

### ***Skills***

The ability to handle interaction with the media and to manage the creation and appropriate dissemination of the organisation's message under pressure requires experience and specialist training. It is important for individuals in the Incident Management Team to be able to demonstrate specific skills that allow them to act and advise in the best interests of the public and NHS Scotland.

Key skills that contribute to this include:

- sourcing information
- defining the message and choosing appropriate language for different audiences
- copywriting
- recording and reporting
- reviewing communications aspects of incidents to inform future strategy
- identifying media training requirements for your organisation
- appropriately communicating risk
- devising effective team communication structures
- creating a communications action plan for the the Incident Management Team
- working effectively within a committee structure

### ***Behaviours***

Skills and knowledge define an ability to carry out certain tasks. However, a successful Incident Management Team member also requires an ability to cope with the challenging environment in which communications professionals often find themselves. It is important, therefore, for education and training initiatives to address and develop the attributes that are required of those likely to be in such a position. These include:

- an ability to act under pressure
- respect for the role and experience of other colleagues
- respect for patients, their family and friends
- an ability to act in accordance with the principles of good communication

## **The Principles of good communication**

- **Integrity**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Competence**
- **Transparency**
- **Accountability**

## Principles for managing the education & training of those involved in communications during Healthcare Associated Infection incidents

Those with responsibility for developing and delivering education can use the following as guiding principles.

- Education about communications and working with the media is particularly important for Incident Management Teams, but an appreciation of good communications practice is important for all NHS Scotland staff
- All training should highlight the contribution that good communication makes to the overall management of an incident
- Organisations should be able to demonstrate a structured training plan /programme reflecting the training needs of all Communications-related Staff, which should be subject to regular review and evaluation.
- Flexible methods of delivering education should be pursued
- Adequate quality assurance and auditing processes should be in place to ensure the ongoing quality and relevance of training programmes. The *HAI Quality Assurance Framework (5)* provides useful guidance

## Summary

This document has been specifically designed to provide a framework for those responsible for communications within, and issued by, an Incident Management Team and related specifically to Healthcare Associated Infection-related incidents. It provides guidance on the role and associated skills, knowledge & behaviours expected of a Communications professional working within an Incident Management Team.

However, the principles and requirements outlined here are applicable in many other healthcare settings and it is intended that a wider exercise will follow to define a more detailed framework for all NHS Scotland communications professionals. In addition to working with the media this expanded framework will involve competencies for a diverse range of skills including public affairs, event management, printed and new media, corporate identity and branding.

## Appendix 1

### ***The Incident Management Team***

The document *Managing incidents presenting actual or potential risks to the public health: guidance on the roles and responsibilities of incident control teams* (3) described the remit, role and membership of the Incident Control Team. Since its publication, the accepted terminology for the team it describes has changed to Incident Management Team (IMT). The following description therefore uses this updated title but retains the remit, role and team membership as originally published.

#### *What is its remit?*

The Incident Management Team is a multidisciplinary, multi-agency group with responsibility for investigating the outbreak/incident and implementing control measures. The remit of the Incident Management Team is, on behalf on the NHS Board and in co-ordination with other agencies, to:

- reduce to a minimum the number of cases of illness by promptly recognising the outbreak/incident,
- defining how cases have been exposed to the implicated hazard, identifying and controlling the source of that exposure and preventing secondary exposure;
- minimise mortality and morbidity by arranging optimum care for those affected;
- inform the public, their representatives and the media of the health risks associated with the incident and how to minimise these risks;
- collect information which will be of use in better understanding the nature and origin of the incident and on how best to prevent and manage future incidents.

#### *What is its role?*

In carrying out this remit, the Incident Management Team should, in a timely manner:

- ensure that systems are in place to collect and collate all relevant information and verify, review and interpret its significance;
- carry out a full risk assessment and decide on courses of action necessary to protect the health of the public;

- co-ordinate the investigation and management of the incident within the protocols and codes of practice of the agencies involved and having regard to extant legislation;
- liaise with relevant agencies to draw on their expertise and ensure necessary actions falling within the responsibility of these bodies are put in place;
- co-ordinate the issuing of advice and information to the public directly and through the media;
- ensure arrangements for the care of patients are in hand and keep all relevant clinical professionals updated;
- declare the end of the incident;
- produce a timely report on the incident and provide information to Health Protection Scotland for outbreak surveillance purposes.

*Who is normally part of the Incident Management Team?*

The Incident Management Team should normally include:

- a NHS Board representative (the DMO, usually a CPHM(CD/EH))
- local authority representative (normally an environmental health officer);
- a scientist with expertise in the detection and characterisation of the hazardous agent involved in the incident e.g. a consultant microbiologist;
- administrative support;
- a press officer.

Usually the Incident Management Team will also contain officers from other relevant agencies e.g. the State Veterinary Service, Scottish Water, whose input is essential to manage the incident. However it is important that the Incident Management Team does not become too large, e.g. more than 10 people.

## References

- (1) *Preventing Infections Acquired while Receiving Health Care : The Scottish Executive's Action Plan to reduce the risk to patients, staff and visitors* (Scottish Executive, 2002)  
**Available online at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)**
- (2) *Guidance on training and support for those involved in media handling in NHS Scotland* SEHD/CMO(2004)7 (6 May 2004)  
**Available online at [www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/CMO\(2004\)07.pdf](http://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/CMO(2004)07.pdf)**
- (3) *Managing incidents presenting actual or potential risks to the public health: guidance on the roles and responsibilities of incident control teams* (Scottish Executive, 2003)  
**Available online at [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)**
- (4) *The Chartered Institute of Public Relations Code of Professional Conduct*  
**Available online at [www.ipr.org.uk](http://www.ipr.org.uk)**
- (5) *A Quality Assurance Framework for the delivery of Healthcare Associated Infection Education for NHS Scotland*, (NHS Education for Scotland in partnership with NHS Quality Improvement Scotland 2005)  
**Available online at [www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/hai/quality.htm](http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/hai/quality.htm)**



